Lone No More: The Sociable Ethical Consumer

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

by

Min-Hye Lee

School of Management
University of Leicester

February 2015
Lone No More: The Sociable Ethical Consumer

By

Min-Hye Lee

Abstract

The growth of ethical consumerism has produced numerous ethical consumption studies in the field of management. However previous studies are often criticised for assuming that ethical consumers are rational decision-makers and that ethical consumption is narrowly understood in an individualistic, rational, and free-choice context.

This thesis argues that consumers are essentially meaning-making beings whose identities are symbolically presented in society and culture. Increasing attention in consumption studies of identity is now being paid to the role of expression and the socio-cultural aspects of consumption. This thesis builds on this to explore the socio-cultural aspects of ethical consumption. It takes an ethnographic approach, using multifaceted qualitative research methods, participant observation and semi-structured interviews to investigate ethical consumption in a self-defined ethically conscious consumer group, the BORA in South Korea.

The empirical data indicate that the notion of ethical consumption is much more complex than purchasing ethical products. It is understood and presented by various activities and meanings which are located in a socially constructed world. The notion of a perfect form or type of ethical consumption is rejected as unattainable and participants adopt the notion of always becoming ethically conscious. Ethical consumption is found to operate in the micro-practices of the everyday. Ethical consumption is revealed to work ‘quietly’ as a subtle and inconspicuous kind of activism embedded in a group context. Ethically conscious consumers are found to generate a form of collective identity through socialisation within a voluntary organisation.

This thesis contributes to establishing an understanding of the complex dynamics of ethical consumption by looking at how ethical consumption is conceived and performed. This thesis also offers a method-in-practice contribution as it reports on the influence linguistic and cultural characteristics play on the way qualitative research is conducted in a different culture context, South Korea.
Acknowledgement

This thesis could not have been completed without the timely and proper advice and support from a number of people around me. First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Matthew Higgins and Dr. Andrea Davies for their unsparing academic advice as well as moral support. Their constructive suggestions and insightful advice based on their admirable expertise and erudition always impressed me. I do appreciate their contribution.

I have to earnestly thank my family for their unending moral support and affectionate attention to me at all times. Words cannot express how grateful I am to my parents and brother. My father, Professor Won-Key Lee has been a tremendous mentor for me, as always, offering invaluable advice, fruitful comments and warm words. My mother, Mi-Ae Park has been the most comfortable being in my life. I do thank her for her incessant prayers for me. My brother, Jong-Min Lee has been a wonderful encourager who knows how to make people think positive. I thank him for giving me inspirations.

My special thanks go to the participant group of this thesis, the BORA who allowed me to get into their world and provided valuable information for my research. They played an essential role in carrying out the research for this thesis. I appreciate their precious time and endeavour.

Many thanks go to my PhD colleagues who have been unforgettable companions on our common journey. I also extend my hearty thanks to the staff members of the School of Management for their efficient service and support all these years, especially Thank you, Teresa Bowdrey.

Finally I dedicate this thesis to the almighty God.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 1
Acknowledgement ................................................................................................................ 2
Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. 3

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 11
1.2 The complex nature of ethical consumption ................................................................. 12
1.3 Ethical consumption from a managerial perspective ...................................................... 13
1.4 The overview of ethical consumption in South Korea ................................................... 15
  1.4.1 The current circumstances of ethical consumption ................................................. 15
  1.4.2 The studies of ethical consumption ...................................................................... 17
1.5 Thesis overview ............................................................................................................. 18

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 The complex dynamics of ethical consumption ............................................................ 20
  2.1.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 20
  2.1.2 Ethical consumption in the field of consumer research and marketing ............... 21
  2.1.3 Understanding consumption from a sociological perspective ........................... 27
    2.1.3.1 The self and the social self .............................................................................. 28
    2.1.3.2 The collective level of consumption ............................................................... 30
  2.1.4 Understanding ethical consumption from a socio-cultural perspective .............. 32
  2.1.5 Consumer activism in mundane consumption ...................................................... 34
    2.1.5.1 Consumer resistance .................................................................................... 35
    2.1.5.2 Consumer creativity .................................................................................... 37
  2.1.6 Summary ................................................................................................................ 38

2.2 Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption ............................................................... 40
2.2.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 40
2.2.2 Veblen’s conspicuous consumption ................................................................. 40
2.2.3 Historical features and conspicuous consumption ......................................... 42
2.2.4 Criticisms of conspicuous consumption ....................................................... 43
  2.2.4.1 Disregard the private pleasure of consumption ........................................ 43
  2.2.4.2 Disregard the time and place ..................................................................... 45
  2.2.4.3 Disregard the needs to go beyond status-oriented consumption ............ 46
2.2.5 The notion of inconspicuous consumption .................................................... 47
  2.2.5.1 Ordinary goods and services ..................................................................... 47
  2.2.5.2 Subtle signals ............................................................................................. 48
  2.2.5.3 New luxury .................................................................................................. 49
2.2.6 Summary ............................................................................................................. 50

2.3 Bourdieu’s theory of taste ..................................................................................... 52
  2.3.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 52
  2.3.2 Pierre Bourdieu’s Distinction ......................................................................... 53
  2.3.3 Micro level: Forms of capital .......................................................................... 54
    2.3.3.1 Economic capital ...................................................................................... 55
    2.3.3.2 Social capital ........................................................................................... 55
    2.3.3.3 Cultural capital ........................................................................................ 56
  2.3.4 Meso level: Habitus ........................................................................................ 58
  2.3.5 Macro level: Field Theory .............................................................................. 59
  2.3.6 Taste ................................................................................................................. 60
  2.3.7 Critiques of Bourdieu’s theory ....................................................................... 61
  2.3.8 Summary ......................................................................................................... 61

2.4 Style ......................................................................................................................... 64
  2.4.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 64
  2.4.2 The concept of style ....................................................................................... 65
  2.4.3 The social meanings of style ......................................................................... 67
  2.4.4 Style in subcultural studies .......................................................................... 68
  2.4.5 Style and authenticity .................................................................................... 69
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.4.6 Brake’s analysis of style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.7 Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Subculture of consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1 Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2 The notion of subculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3 Four features of subculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.1 The relationship between the subcultural group and the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.2 Subculture and the construction and expression of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.3 Hierarchical structure of subculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.4 Subculture and group membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4 Subcultural boundary: space and place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.5 Summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 3 Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Research questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Philosophical assumptions: Ontology and Epistemology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Gaining access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 About the BORA group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1 Participant observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Collected data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Data analysis: Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Ethical issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Methodological implications in the Korean context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 Limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11 Summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Organisational dynamic: The BORA group

4.1.1 Introduction

4.1.2 The origins of the BORA

4.1.3 The organisational characteristics of the BORA

4.1.4 The political belief of the BORA

4.1.5 The common interest of the BORA

4.1.6 Summary

4.2 Ethical consumption: Always becoming the ethically conscious consumer

4.2.1 Introduction

4.2.2 Forms of ethical consumption

4.2.2.1 Sharing party

4.2.2.2 World Fair Trade Festival

4.2.3 Summary and implications

4.3 Realistic-Idealist: Realised through micro-practices/mundane consumption

4.3.1 Introduction

4.3.2 Personal sacrifice and individual effort in an activity ‘Balwoo Gongyang’

4.3.3 Go beyond Fair Trade coffee: focusing on the container of the coffee

4.3.4 Summary and implications

4.4 Sociality: Co-learning and diffusion through ethical consumption related activities

4.4.1 Introduction

4.4.2 Sharing party

4.4.3 Used-book reading club

4.4.4 Summary and implications

4.5 Subtle cues: Possessing inside knowledge/inconspicuousness

4.5.1 Introduction

4.5.2 The meaning of re-usable items
4.5.3 Fashion style: The choice of a particular item accommodates a particular lifestyle.................................................................200
4.5.4 Space: The choice of a particular place accommodates a particular lifestyle........206
4.5.4.1 The BORA’s choice of place at a group level ..................................................207
4.5.4.2 An individual BORA member’s choice of place ........................................213
4.5.5 Summary and implications ............................................................................219

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction........................................................................................................221
5.2 The ethically conscious consumer .................................................................221
5.3 Realistic-Idealist..............................................................................................225
5.4 Sociality ............................................................................................................229
5.5 Subtle signals ....................................................................................................234

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Concluding remarks .......................................................................................240
6.2 Research questions .........................................................................................241
6.3 Theoretical insights .......................................................................................242
6.4 Managerial implications ................................................................................245
6.5 Methodological implications .........................................................................250
6.6 Limitations .......................................................................................................251
6.7 Reflections and directions of future research ..............................................252

Appendices

1 Email discussion with the gatekeeper before the fieldwork .................................255
2 The scheme and the aim of each stage in the BORA activities ..........................256
3 Observation and interview schedules ..............................................................256
   3.1 Observation schedule .................................................................................256
   3.2 Interview schedule ....................................................................................258
3.2.1 Group 3 .................................................................258
3.2.2 Group 4 .................................................................258
  3.2.2.1 1st Interview ......................................................258
  3.2.2.2 2nd Interview ......................................................258
4 Consent forms .............................................................259
  4.1 Observation consent form ..............................................259
  4.2 Interview consent form ...............................................260
5 List of interviewees .......................................................261
  5.1 Group 3 ................................................................261
  5.2 Group 4 ................................................................262

Bibliography ......................................................................264-324
The list of tables

Table 1 Definitions/meanings of various terms in ethical consumption studies .................. 22
Table 2 The paradigm shifts of various terms in ethical consumption studies ................... 24
Table 3 Periods of each group’s activities ........................................................................ 105
Table 4 Types of activities .................................................................................................. 107
The list of pictures

Picture 1 Sharing party
Picture 2 A booth of an ethical fashion company participating in the 2012 World Fair Trade Festival
Picture 3 A booth of the Seoul Global High School participating in the 2012 World Fair Trade Festival
Picture 4 Face painting activity
Picture 5 Learning the issue of Fair Trade via quiz games
Picture 6 Experiencing ethical consumption and ethical production
Picture 7 Used-book reading club
Picture 8 Ethically produced shoes from the ethical brand ‘Civic Duty’
Picture 9 Shoes from a popular commercial shoe brand ‘Converse’
Picture 10 The entrance of CHD
Picture 11 The front place of CHD
Picture 12 Bookstands in CHD
Picture 13 The ground floor of CHD
Picture 14 Furniture and interior design of CHD
Picture 15 The entrance of ‘Half-warehouse’
Picture 16 Individual customer’s space in the cafe
Picture 17 A flea market in the cafe
Picture 18 ‘Save the cup, Save the earth’
Picture 19 A revolutionary activism of ethical consumption
Picture 20 Lavazza’s edible cookie cup
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

We consciously and unconsciously encounter ethical consumption in various ways. For instance, students learn the term ‘ethical consumption’ in school. We see ethically produced goods in supermarkets such as Fair Trade coffee or organic milk, etc. We see advertisements of eco-friendly cars while reading magazines. People who love pets may participate in some of the campaigns for animal protection. Children may notice advertisement boards on the streets for recycling. It seems fair to say that most people are actually exposed to ethical consumption in their daily lives. However, do we actually understand ethical consumption? Do people actually think about ethical consumption? Ethical consumption is something everyone seems to know, but few actually know.

Ethical consumption has been extensively explored across various disciplines not only by academics but also by managers. The field of ethical consumption shows no sign of diminishing in the area of management over the last decade (for a review see for example McEachern and Carrigan, 2012). Even though there are numerous ethical consumption studies conducted by management academics, there is an acceptance that ethical consumption still remains mysterious and elusive (Devinney et al., 2010). Ethical consumption has been understood based on the traditional theories of consumption which tend to view the consumer as a rational choice-maker, that is, “choice made on the basis of deliberate, systematic calculation of the maximum extent to which the ends can be met by using the inevitably scarce means” (Jang, 2014, p. 20). By defining consumption in terms of this traditional theoretical approach, other aspects of consumption have been relatively ignored. Thus ethical consumption is understood in a limited way and ethical consumption studies have extensively focused on the aspect of purchasing ethical products, particularly highlighting the rational processes of buying behaviours by weighing up the product attributes and claims.

In a managerial and practical sense, ethical consumption seems to be considered novel
or special. You probably remember that a majority of ethical products such as Fair Trade items or organic goods are normally located or displayed in a separate section. Then ethical consumption seems to be set apart from ordinary consumers and it concerns only a certain group of people who are affluent or ethical consumption-minded. Business managers also seem to consider ethical consumption as a unique entity in that they use the term ‘ethical marketing’ as a kind of jargon, including some kinds of special strategies (Fan, 2005).

1.2 The complex nature of ethical consumption

Ethical consumption is part of a broader consumption picture (Szmigin and Carrigan, 2006). In other words, ethical consumption exists within the realm of consumption which most consumers experience in their daily lives. Thus, anyone who would like to understand and find solutions to social and ecological problems may join social change projects via their consumption activities (Micheletti, 2003; Barnett et al., 2005a; Arnould, 2007). As Burke and Milberg (1993) claim, all purchasing behaviour is in some sense ethical and ‘ordinary’ people are involved in ethical consumption. Starr (2009, p. 916) also explains the phenomenon of ethical consumption in daily life arguing that, “people purchase and use products and resources according not only to the personal pleasures and values they provide, but also to ideas of what is right and good, versus wrong and bad, in a moral sense.”

However, we might question that ethical consumption is about determining ‘right or wrong’ (or ‘good or bad’) in the sense of being ‘ethical or unethical’. This is because there are no exact dimensions and criteria that can define the meaning of ‘ethical’. For instance, driving an eco-friendly car with lower greenhouse emissions is ethical when compared with driving a normal car. However, walking instead of driving is obviously more ethical. In this sense, driving an eco-friendly car is relatively unethical if we consider the value of walking. Clark (2006) similarly argues that nothing is truly ethical and that we only consider some degree of concern with ethics. This implies that the concept of ethical consumption is not definitive but it has complex dynamics which accommodate multiple interpretations and understandings. These relate to the various
forms or types of ethical consumption. Numerous studies demonstrate interest in the purchase of ethically and socially conscious products (Trudel and Cotte, 2009), but ethical consumption can be presented in a myriad of forms to include the purchase of ethical goods, but also they extend to charitable donations, recycling activities, participating in ethical consumption-related campaigns or demonstrations (e.g., boycotts), or even restricting consumption (Szmigin and Carrigan, 2006; White et al., 2012). This clearly shows diversity in ethical values, ethos and consumption practices.

Ethical consumption also covers various areas of concern. Starr (2009) analyses the primary issues in ethical consumption such as environmental sustainability, biodiversity, nature, endangered species, genetically modified crops and animals, free trade in tropical commodities, abusive labour practices, animal welfare, local economy, repressive regimes and consumerist lifestyles (see also Clark and Unterberger, 2007; Jones et al., 2007). Starr (2009) argues that each issue has more specific concerns, ethical objections and ethical practices; for instance the issue of ‘environmental sustainability’ has 6 special concerns, 2 ethical objections and 13 ethical practices. This illustrates the complex dynamics of ethical consumption which deals with numerous realms ranging from the environmental, social, cultural, managerial, and policy sector to the political field.

1.3 Ethical consumption from a managerial perspective

Along with the discussion of consumers’ moral ethos, companies also make various efforts to become ‘good companies’ that is, companies that have a reputation of being socially responsible (Castaldo et al., 2009). This is often referred to or captured by the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which is defined as, “the actions taken by firms with respect to their employees, communities, and the environment that go beyond what is legally required of a firm” (Barnea and Rubin, 2010, p. 71, see also McWilliams et al., 2006). CSR is one of the most significant corporate trends of the last decade because consumers themselves frequently claim that the aspect of social responsibility plays a large role in what brands they choose to purchase (Castaldo et al., 2009). There is increasing evidence that lots of companies spend a substantial amount
of expense conducting CSR-related activities (Barnea and Rubin, 2010): for instance, according to Forbes (“Responsibility Pays,” November 11, 2007), GE spends approximately $2 billion annually on new environmental technologies, $800 million on management systems that work to reduce the company’s environmental footprint, $300 million on social programmes, and $60 million on ecomagination-related marketing. These numbers demonstrate the fact that companies recognise the importance of social responsibility in their businesses. In particular, the impact of CSR reputation on consumers cannot be ignored even though the issue of dependable correlations between a firm’s CSR reputation and consumer reactions seems to remain inconclusive (Castaldo et al., 2009).

Despite this inconclusive link between CSR reputation and consumer reactions to brands, companies continue to develop and conduct ethical marketing strategies based on the CSR ethos. One of the manifest examples is ‘ethical branding’ which is a subset of ethical marketing. Fan (2005) explains ethical branding is a branding strategy based on certain moral principles that define right and wrong behaviour in branding decisions. In other words, a brand should consider not only the economic or financial criteria but also the moral ones in its business. The case of Coca Cola clearly shows how ethical branding/marketing is used: Coca Cola promotes itself as follows: “through our actions as local citizens, we strive every day to refresh the marketplace, enrich the workplace, preserve the environment and strengthen our communities” (cocacola.com). Ethical branding is essentially about developing and managing the relationship between the organisation and its various stakeholders as well as the general public (Fan, 2005). Behind this seemingly noble statement, there is another Coca Cola which aims to achieve more profits: according to its former senior vice chairman, “to encourage as many people as possible to drink as much Coca Cola as possible at the highest possible price so that the company could make even more money” (Zagman, 1992 cited in Kapferer, 2001). It shows that ethical branding is not just a simple management tool but it is rather a complex strategy which Fan (2005) argues includes a sharp contrast between the words and the deeds.

The concept of CSR is a complex subject including diverse interpretations, practices
and regulatory mechanisms (Okoye, 2009). For instance, Lantos (2001) divides the notion of CSR into three sectors: ethical, altruistic and strategic CSR. Windsor (2006) identifies ethical responsibility, economic responsibility and corporate citizenship. Garriga and Mele’s (2004) four-group classification of CSR is seen as one of the more comprehensive theories: instrumental, political, integrative and ethical. More specifically, instrumental theories cover the way of enhancing economic objectives through social activities. Second, political theories deal with corporate power and its responsible use. Third, integrative theories cover the ways of responding to social demands. Finally, ethical theories examine the morality and rightness of corporate social action. These views demonstrate the complex picture of CSR but it is noticeable that there is a common feature which overlaps within those theories. One example of this is that companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations on a voluntary basis (Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

1.4 The overview of ethical consumption in South Korea

1.4.1 The current circumstances of ethical consumption

In 2003, The Beautiful Store\(^1\) which is a leading social enterprise in South Korea first introduced Fair Trade coffee called ‘The gift of Himalaya’ (Koh, 2009). Since then various companies and organisations started to have an interest in and participate in Fair Trade businesses in South Korea. According to The Hankyoreh (2009), the sales of Fair Trade goods in South Korea have shown a steep increase from 35,000 GBP in 2004 to 1,700,000 GBP in 2008.

The Beautiful Store has undoubtedly contributed to spreading the philosophy of ethical consumption by opening its stores in South Korea: “by donating unused items, saving resources, buying ethical products, caring underprivileged neighbour around us, participating in volunteering, all of these activities will contribute to creating a strong tie between everyone” (The Beautiful Store, 2014). Some other companies have also

\(^1\) The Beautiful Store is a Korean version of ‘Oxfam’. It is not only the first registered social enterprise but also the pioneer which opens up new markets inside and outside Korea (The Beautiful Store, 2014).
participated in a march to promote ethical consumption in South Korea. For instance, some home shopping channels have started to sell ethical products of social enterprises and run donation programmes (Han, 2014). It is also easy to find a myriad of newspaper articles which introduce the notion of ethical consumption and offer practical information that help consumers to join ethical consumption. For instance, Lee (2012) introduces some ethical brands and ethically produced goods. Cha (2013) offers information about the Fair Trade travelling programmes. Non-profit organisations such as Korea Social Enterprise Association, Korea Fair Trade Association, Korea YMCA Association, etc. also have conducted ethical consumption related activities such as Fair Trade festivals and ethical consumption essay competitions (Jung, 2013).

With the help of various agencies ethical consumption has permeated into the Korean society as a social trend. South Korean consumers have started to consider and reflect on the ethical ethos on their consumption practices. At first, they had an interest in ethical consumption for their personal wellbeing, for instance, mothers who have infants would like to purchase organic produce for their family’s health and safety. More recently they have started to focus on the importance of social responsibility and to consider the public values in their consumption practices (Koh, 2009). In this way, consumers have started to look at a broader context of ethical consumption such as ecology, environment, community, etc.

Even though ethical consumption has become a significant social phenomenon in South Korea, it is still new and undeveloped. The CEO of Korea Fair Trade Association says, “the issue of Fair Trade has been dealt with for more than 50 years in Western countries like the US. However, Korea has a relatively short history of Fair Trade” (Lee et al., 2008). When The Beautiful Store conducted a survey about the issue of alternative trades\(^2\) in 2008, 69.6 per cent of respondents indicated that they were willing to purchase alternative trade goods but those who actually knew about the notion of alternative trade and ethical consumption accounted for only 3 per cent (Lee et al., 2008). This implies that ethical consumption is an area which still needs developing in South Korea.

\(^2\) In Korean, the term ‘alternative trade’ means ethical trade.
1.4.2 The studies of ethical consumption

The low level of perception of ethical conception in South Korea also can be seen in academic circles. First of all, there are few studies which show statistical figures or editorial analyses of the existing studies in the field of ethical consumption. Thus it is hard to know how ethical consumption studies have been conducted in South Korea. Moreover, the existing studies are inclined to focus on certain areas. A majority of ethical consumption studies are limited to particular industries such as food (Hong and Song, 2008) or clothes (Koh, 2009; Jung, 2011; Kaea and Yang, 2011; Lee and Lee, 2013). In addition these studies focus extensively on the issue of ‘purchase’ so they are limited to investigating motivation or intention to purchase ethical products (e.g. Hong and Song, 2008). Even though there are a few studies which deal with the performative aspect of ethical consumption, the existing studies are also limited to actual purchase and do not consider aspect beyond purchase. For instance, Koh (2009) investigated ethical consumption behaviours in South Korea by conducting 19 in-depth interviews but this study was limited to those who had experience of buying ethical products. Hong and Shin (2011) investigated ethical consumption behaviours of college students in South Korea but it was concerned with classifying types of ethical consumption behaviours. Jung (2011) conducted an ethnographical study of ethical consumption behaviours but it was limited to the area of clothing consumption. Thus, there has been a lack of in-depth discussion about ethical consumption behaviours.

This demonstrates that there is still room for further development in understanding ethical consumption generally (see section 1.2) and also specifically in the South Korean context. This thesis makes the first attempt to investigate ethical consumption in the South Korean context from a socio-cultural perspective. In particular this thesis employs an ethnographic approach to investigating South Korean consumers’ ethical consumption practices in great depth. The thesis is distinctive from previous studies because it goes beyond the aspect of purchasing behaviours and examines various aspects of ethical consumption practices.
1.5 Thesis overview

This thesis is composed of five chapters. Each chapter is constructed as follows:

In Chapter 2, I provide an extensive review of the literature in the field of ethical consumption as well as in the area of consumption studies. This chapter starts with exploring previous studies of ethical consumption in various disciplines such as management, sociology, psychology, theology, etc. It shows how ethical consumption has been understood and conducted in multiple perspectives. I narrow down various interpretations of ethical consumption to de-limit the view of ethical consumption held in consumer research. This approach attends on the need of re-visiting the notion of consumption. I examine the theoretical understandings of consumption going beyond a traditional point of view, that is, the utilitarian dimension and adopting a socio-cultural perspective. First of all, I draw on some of the work of Veblen, focusing on the notion of conspicuous consumption which claims the importance of the social influence of consumption. Following Veblen’s theory, the concept of inconspicuous consumption is introduced and examined. Inconspicuous consumption is an extended and modified form of conspicuous consumption. Next, I introduce Bourdieu’s work on distinction, exploring how the social nature of consumption in daily lives including the notion of capital, habitus, field and taste has been studied in consumer research and can be usefully applied to the study of ethical consumption. In relation to the notion of taste, the sociological concept of style is introduced because Brake’s notion of style gives a particular emphasis to understanding how consumers present themselves through their consumption practices. These theories consolidate and advance the idea that consumption plays a role of an expressive tool to present one’s identity. Finally, studies that examine the subculture are reviewed in order to further understand the nature of the construction, presentation and performance of one’s identities because subcultural consumption studies offer a rich heritage of understanding identity from the socio-cultural perspective and where consumption is deeply implicated in those performances.

In Chapter 3, the methodological design of this thesis is presented. This chapter starts with re-visiting the research questions and outlines the philosophical assumptions
underpinning the thesis. In line with this, the research methods employed in this thesis: participant observation and in-depth interviews are explained. I then discuss and justify the processes of data collection, ranging from the sampling process, research methods to the process of data analysis. Finally, I consider and reflect upon some of the participants’ reflections earned from the field to explain the methodological implications of conducting these methods in the South Korean context.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this thesis. This chapter delivers an extensive description of what I’ve experienced and learnt during the fieldwork. Before discussing the findings, I portray the organisational dynamics of the participant group in order to help understand the background of the participants and the circumstances of the fieldwork. The findings are divided into four sections that represent the key themes evident in the collected data. In each section, the original data are presented describing some of the activities, the participants’ performances, the formal and informal conversations and the interviews which are attributed to each theme.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion based on the findings made in Chapter 4. Each finding is contextualised within the theoretical and conceptual frameworks presented in Chapter 2. Here the meanings and contributions of the findings are divided into four sections following each theme presented in Chapter 4. The main contributions of this study can be condensed into the following key words: always becoming ethically conscious, realistic-idealist, sociality and subtle cues.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides a detailed summary of the key points. It re-visits the research questions, the objectives and findings of this thesis to address the theoretical, managerial and methodological contributions. By synthesising the whole set of thesis, some of the critical reflections as well as possible directions for the future research are discussed.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 The complex dynamics of ethical consumption

2.1.1 Introduction

Since the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, the world’s leading consumer cooperative, was established in the 19th century ethical consumption has been extensively explored (Lee, 2009). For instance, in the field of theology, ethical consumption is often attended to by looking at ethical purchasing practices at Christmas from religious, moral and cultural perspectives (Wenell, 2009). In the field of Economics, ethical consumption is developed by investigating factors associated with tendencies to ‘buy ethically’ (Starr, 2009). In the field of management, more diverse ethical consumption studies have been produced; for example, studies that investigate the attitudinal and psychological variables of consumers’ ethical decision-making (Bray et al., 2011), studies that examine the behaviour of voluntary simplicity (e.g. Ballantine and Creery, 2010), studies that focus on the green consumption and sustainable marketing (e.g. Follows and Jobber, 2000; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Fraj and Martinez, 2007; Belz and Peattie, 2009; Finisterra do Paço and Raposo, 2010; Rettie et al., 2012).

Newholm and Shaw’s (2007) review of studies in ethical consumption, however, criticises these earlier studies in that they deal with various issues within the field of ethical consumption in various disciplines such as geography, sociology and psychology without clear boundaries. Previous studies are not systematic because they focus on different aspects of ethical consumption and they are patchy in coverage. In The Myth of the Ethical Consumer, Devinney et al. (2010, p. 9) also argue that “the notion of ethical consumerism is too broad in its definition, too loose in its operationalisation, and too moralistic in its stance to be anything other than a myth.” This critique also identifies the complexity of the terms used in the field of ethical consumption such as ethical consumer, ethical consumption, ethical consumerism, green consumption or sustainable consumption, etc. These terms are adopted and used
interchangeably without offering a clear definition.

These previous studies seem to cohere around on assumption that ethical consumption is the same as ‘ethical buying’ and ethical consumers are ‘ethical purchasers’. Ethical consumption studies, particularly in the field of management, argue that the ethical consumer still remains an elusive character with profiles that seem to be inconclusive, or studies that are unable to bridge the ‘attitude-behaviour’ gap (e.g. Carrington et al., 2010). This thesis contends that these results are perhaps an inevitable outcome of the conceptualization of ethical consumption as an individual’s conscious choice for buying to signify personal beliefs towards the society (Crane and Matten, 2004). Szmigin and Carrigan (2006) have argued that ethical consumption requires further exploration and investigation in terms of what it means to consumers beyond external and instrumental reasons such as welfare, pollution and appropriate disposal. In this vein, this thesis seeks to re-examine the complex dynamics of ethical consumption. In doing so, it will move beyond the individual decision-making model.

This section starts by re-visiting previous ethical consumption studies in the field of marketing and consumer research. By looking at how ethical consumption has been defined, understood and studied, this section then emphasises the need to recognise and examine the complexity of ethical consumption. Through this detailed analysis, the notion of ethical consumption will be re-constructed with the proposition for considering in more depth a variety of issues within ethical consumption. Ethical consumption is such a sensitive and broad topic which should not be limited to investigating the buying behaviours of ethical products in the marketplace.

### 2.1.2 Ethical consumption in the field of consumer research and marketing

As Prothero (1998) predicted, the field of green or ethical marketing shows no sign of diminishing as numerous ethical consumption-related studies have been produced in marketing journals. For example, there are studies that identify ethical values and motives for ethical product choices (e.g. Honkanen et al., 2006); studies that focus on ethical consumer decision making (e.g. Shaw et al., 2005); studies that examine
consumer intentions and behaviours toward ethical products (While et al., 2012); and studies that investigate consumers’ thoughts about ethical products (Luo and Battacharya, 2006; Auger and Devinney, 2007; Trudel and Cotte, 2009; Aaker et al., 2010; Carrington et al., 2010; Luchs et al., 2010).

Despite the breadth of interest, previous studies have been criticised for having only a partial understanding of ethical consumption by focusing too much on ethical products, the individual consumer, and invoking common attitude-behaviour pitfalls (McEachern and Carrigan, 2012). Devinney et al. (2010) also argue that previous ethical consumption studies have often focused on an ‘attitude-behaviour’ gap (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Chatzidakis et al., 2007) in which consumers’ self-described preferences for ethical products often do not link to actual purchasing behaviour.

Moreover it is criticised that various terms are interchangeably adopted and used in ethical consumption studies without a clear definition and explanation (Devinney et al., 2010) (also see section 2.1.1). The terms like ‘ethics’, ‘ethical consumption’, ‘ethical consumer behaviour’ and ‘ethical consciousness’ seem to have similar meanings but they are not identical. It is thus necessary to re-visit and clarify the definition of each term. This not only shows the overall picture of ethical paradigms in consumer research but also demonstrates where my thesis is positioned in. The Tables 1 and 2 show how these terms are defined, understood and used in consumer research and marketing.

**Table 1** Definitions/meanings of various terms in ethical consumption studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Consumer research and marketing studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>• Misconduct, mainly in retail settings (e.g. Vitell et al., 1991; Vitell and Muncy, 1992; Fullerton et al., 1996; Albers-Miller, 1999; Singhapakdi et al., 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A code of ethics for consumers (Stampfl, 1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A set of strategies for combating consumer abuse (Schubert, 1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumers’ judgments concerning how ‘wrong’ certain activities are such as the extent of illegal or fraudulent consumer behaviour (Wilkes, 1978)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Ethical consumption | “An expression of the individual’s moral judgment in his or her purchase behaviour” (Smith, 1990, p. 178)  
| | “The degree to which consumers prioritize their own ethical concerns when making product choices” (Shaw and Clarke, 1998, p. 163)  
| | “Buying products which are not harmful to the environment and society. This can be as simple as buying freerange eggs or as complex as boycotting goods produced by child labour” (Harper and Makatouni, 2002, p. 289)  
| | “Actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. Their choices are based on attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, or noneconomic issues that concern personal and family well-being and ethical or political assessment of favorable and unfavorable business and government practice.” (Micheletti, 2003, p. 2)  
| | “The conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values” (Crane and Matten, 2004, p. 290)  
| | “Having political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motivations for choosing one product over another” (Harrison et al., 2005, p. 2)  
| | “The conscious choice of particular products such as detergents low in bleach as well as the rejection of others such as purchasing gasoline from Esso because of the company’s approach to global warming” (Szmigin and Carrigan, 2006, p. 609)  
| | The act of purchasing products that have additional attributes (e.g., social, environmental, political, health, etc.) in addition to their immediate use-value, to signify (Long and Murray, 2013)  
| Ethical consumer behaviour | Consumer behaviours which are concerned with environmental, animal and ethical issues when purchasing products (Mintel, 1994)  
| | Without ignoring price and quality, applying some additional (and sometimes prior) criteria in the decision-making process (Harrison et al., 2005)  
| | Consumption behaviour which implements social responsibility in the pursuit of moral belief (Hong and Song, 2008)  
| Ethically | Ethically conscious or ethically minded feeling which includes a
consciousness responsibility towards the environment and/or to society, and seeks to express their values through ethical consumption and purchasing (or boycotting) behaviour (De Pelsmacker et al., 2006; Shaw and Shui, 2002).

- The process of becoming ‘greening’ rather than ‘green’ (McDonald et al., 2006)
- The broader range of issues (including environmentalism) and complex processes integrated within ethical consumerism (Freestone and McGoldrick, 2008)
- ‘Ethical’ will encapsulate different expressions, concerns and issues for each individual for instance ethical concerns for the ethically minded include environmental/green issues, sustainability concerns, workers’ rights, country of origin, arms trade, fair trade and animal welfare. (Carrington et al., 2010)
- A more nuanced understanding of how ethical consumer discourses, micro-cultures, and identities are constructed in the marketplace and beyond (e.g. Barnett et al., 2005a; Caruana and Crane, 2008; Moraes et al., 2010)
- Developing, moving and staying in ethical spaces which have a set of cultural distinctiveness (Chatzidakis et al., 2012)

Table 2 The paradigm shifts of various terms in ethical consumption studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Ethical consumption</th>
<th>Ethical consumer behaviour</th>
<th>Ethically consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged with 1) moral aspects of human beings such as misbehaviours in shopping or 2) legal aspect of buying behaviours</td>
<td>Ethical consumption is associated with the buying behaviours which reflect and signify consumers’ concerns, or feelings of responsibility toward the society (Valor, 2006; Lee, 2009).</td>
<td>“Decision-making, purchases and other consumption experiences that are affected by the consumer’s ethical concerns” (Cooper-Martin and Holbrook, 1993, p. 113).</td>
<td>A consideration of ‘ethicality’ of their consumption practices in daily lives in order to get close to any forms of ethical lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Examples | Shoplifting, Illegal importations/ | The act of purchasing ethical | Buying ethically produced goods, | Second-hand consumption, |
### Associated theoretical and contextual frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exports, Counterfeits, Failing to declare undercharging</th>
<th>Products, individual decision making, Boycott, Voluntary simplicity, Campaigns, Demonstrations</th>
<th>Recycling, Up-cycling, Modification of goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutralisation theory (Chatzidakis et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Individual decision making processes (Crane and Matten, 2004), Attitude-behaviour gap (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000), Motivational factors to buy ethical products (Harrison et al., 2005)</td>
<td>Revolutionary forms of political voice (Roux, 2007), Consumer resistance (Doyle, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and cultural context: micro-culture and identity (Barnett et al., 2005a; Caruana and Crane, 2008; Moraes et al., 2010), The social or group norm (Chatzidakis et al., 2012), Mundane consumption (Ulver-Sneistrup et al., 2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the Tables 1 and 2, first of all, the notion of ethics seems to be on a different wavelength. They are different from field to field. The meaning of ethics in consumer research is closely associated with the legal aspect rather than the social, ethical or philanthropic value of consumption. My thesis does not cover consumers’ misbehaviours or illicit actions.

Second, the paradigm shifts of various terms in ethical consumption studies are noticeable. Previous studies in the last 1990s and early 2000s adopted and used the term ‘ethical consumption’ focusing mainly on the aspect of buying ethical products and considering it as the definitive form of ethical consumption. Perhaps viewing ethical consumption as ethical purchase might have understandably framed and structured how the notion of ethical consumption came to be defined. This thesis contends that this view towards ethical consumption originates from understanding the notion of consumption through a utilitarian framework. Utilitarian consumption is to accomplish a functional or practical task and so it is cognitively driven, instrumental, and goal-oriented (Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998). In other words, utilitarian consumption can be
connected to cognitive or reasoned preferences (so-called ‘should’) that underlie the consumer’s choice which are distinct from affective preferences (so-called ‘wants’) (Bazerman et al., 1998). For example, items that are high on hedonic value belong to ‘want’ preferences, and items that are high on utilitarian value belong to ‘should’ preferences (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000).

As the review of studies provided here shows ethical consumption has been understood based on the utilitarian view of consumption so it has been limited to the decision-making processes and purchasing behaviours. The utilitarian view towards consumption has been criticised because it ignores other aspects of consumption such as the socio-cultural aspect of consumption which is opposed to the utilitarian function value (Connolly and Prothero, 2003). If people do not necessarily consume based on their needs, then it is necessary to explore other aspects of consumption as it can help us to understand the concept of ethical consumption in a broader sense.

This view implies what philosophy/theory of ethics is being used to frame and position the notion of ethical consumption in this thesis. Hunt and Vitell’s (1986) general theory of marketing ethics explains how individuals (e.g. consumers) arrive at a particular ethical judgment by focusing on the philosophical principles of deontology (obligations or rules) and teleology (guided by the consequences of actions) (Marks and Mayo, 1991; Vitell et al., 2001; Bray et al., 2011). Teleological approaches focus mainly on evaluating consequences (e.g. right actions being right because they bring good consequences) which could delimit ethical consumption practices (e.g. ethical purchasing). This view could ignore various forms/types of ethical consumption practices which could possibly bring non-positive values if seeing from the perspective of utilitarianism. Thus this thesis takes deontological approaches to ethics which focus on “the content of duty without considering the consequences of particular ways of acting” (Macdonald and Beck-Dudley, 1994, p. 615).

Recent ethical consumption studies also tend to go beyond the definition of ethical purchasing and they start to concentrate on the diverse and complex nature of ethical consumption in our daily lives. Moreover by employing more subtle and nuanced terms
such as ‘ethically conscious’ or ‘ethically minded’, it shows that the field of ethical consumption could be presented in various forms and practices and it is linked to other fields such as the social or cultural context. This view will be further explored in this thesis by taking a multi-subject approach. In doing so the next section of this section attempts to draw out how the realms of ethical consumption can be re-examined and re-constructed.

2.1.3 Understanding consumption from a sociological perspective

The concept of consumption can too easily be understood as the individual consumer’s simple buying behaviour process so the consumer is seen as a rational information seeking decision maker (Foxall, 1983; Solomon, 1996). The study of consumption is manifest across the social sciences and the manner in which people behave and influence the world around us (ESRC, 2014) is much more complex and dynamic, falling into the multi-disciplinary areas. The concept of consumption is interconnected with various fields including various issues such as environmental waste, unfair labour practices and their negative impacts on human health (The University of Michigan, 2010).

In particular Zukin and Maquire (2004) emphasise that consumption is a social, cultural, and economic process of choosing goods because individual men and women experience consumption as a project of forming and expressing identity. In choosing how to spend money and time, people do not always conform to the ascribed analytic categories currently proffered by academia (e.g., ethnicity, gender, age, VALS group, or social class) but they create their own categories such as the group of Harley-Davidson motorcycle owners (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Therefore, it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify consumers by using consumer segment variables because they are shifting aggregations of emotionally bonded people who are more societal sparkle than socio-economic certainty such as a ‘tribe’ which is “a cohort of individuals who share similar experiences and emotions, and who bond together in loosely interconnected communities” (Cova and Cova, 2001, p. 68).
People purchase and use material goods in order to fulfil and reveal their individual desires so consumption becomes an expressive tool (Doyle, 2011). As people are meaning-making beings whose identities rest in the symbolic systems of society and culture, increasing attention is now being given to illustrating some of the complexities of consumer behaviour (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Marketing and consumer researchers also assert that individuals consume products and brands for their symbolic properties as much as for functional benefits (Levy, 1959; Elliott, 1999). Levy (1959) argued that consumption is driven not only by function but also by symbolic value. Researchers have concluded that possessions are meaningful in ways that are uniquely marked out by our own histories and simultaneously they act as signals of identity (e.g. Veblen, 1899; Berger and Heath, 2007; Ellis et al., 2011). A recent study by Deloitte (2013) contends that consumers are offering comments not only about their consumption practices, but also about the processes of production and management. Following with this, the term ‘prosumer’ which is a compound word of producer and consumer, and is defined as “a consumer who becomes involved with designing or customizing products for their own needs” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014c) has become commonly applied. Similar to this, in Korea there is a term ‘modisumer’ which describes a consumer who modifies the original recipe of the product and re-creates their own product such as creating a new type of noodle by mixing two different flavours of instant noodles (Shin, 2014). Some consumers transform a soup-typed noodle to a fried noodle by reducing the amount of water (Lee, 2014). In other words, purchasing an instant noodle is not just based on the purpose of feeding oneself, but contains other motivations and intentions such as showing off one’s idea or taste. In this vein, consumption becomes the presentation of identity, saying that, “I shop, consume, and produce, therefore I am” and it is considered to be the core part of modern consumer culture and society.

2.1.3.1 The self and the social self

The meaning of consumption is not limited to the economic model, but it has been enlarged to psychological models or sociological models (Doyle, 2011). Psychological models attribute an intermingling of functional and symbolic drivers to buying, but sociological models prioritise the view that consumers are influenced by the social
forces (Doyle, 2011). For instance, a consumer purchases an iPhone not just because of its functional benefits, but because of its brand identity and the symbolic value of the brand. By having an iPhone, one can show the taste of the modern and sophisticated gadget and display social status which proves that one can afford it.

Focusing on ‘what we have’ is significant in order to understand who we are, since our material possessions are viewed as major parts of our extended selves (James, 1892; Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Sartre, 1998). Rochberg-Halton (1984, p. 335) argues, “valued material possessions…act as signs of the self that are essential in their own right for its continued cultivation, and hence the world of meaning that we create for ourselves, and that creates ourselves, extends literally into the objective surroundings.” The self is understood by personal possessions and external objects. For instance, if I have a Fair Trade cotton bag, people may consider or assume that I am an ethical consumer. Moreover, Belk (1988, p. 159) says that, “possessions in our extended self also give us a personal archive or museum that allows us to reflect on our histories and how we have changed.” In this vein, our material possessions tell narratives of our life. Putting it in an extreme way, Fromm (1976, p. 36) even constructs the formula that “‘who I am’ is defined by ‘what I have and what I consume’.”

However, we should not simply conclude that consumption is limited to understanding the symbolic meaning of possessions that implement and sustain the self. Consumption not only symbolically creates and sustains the self but also locates us in society (Wattanasuwan, 2005). As every individual is ultimately involved in society, one’s possessions are also socialised objects which signify different meaning in different social contexts. Brownlie et al. (2007) concur citing that a focus on the individual fails to address the ‘socialness’ of such material objects (Riggins, 1994). People use consumption as a means of encoding messages to others through their consumption practices, and also for decoding messages from others’ consumption practices (Holman, 1980; Belk et al., 1982). In doing so they create their own culture, for instance, Harley Davidson owners actively interact with each other by having Harley’s products and sharing their own consumption experiences, which ultimately construct their own culture (Schouten and McAlexander, 1993). In other words, an importance lies not only
in the symbolic meaning of goods, but also in how the symbol is used as an outward expression of the user’s self-concept and connection to the society (Elliott, 1999). Brownlie et al. (2007) assert consumption works as cultural formation and the part played by exemplary artefacts in performing identity within complex webs of social relations. Individuals can use the symbolic content of chosen consumption objects to reflect their affiliation or connection to a particular social group (e.g. Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998a). For example, some may reject or accept certain products based on the reference group’s tastes or preferences. Dittmar (1992, p. 2) goes as far as to suggest that, “by buying goods, we magically acquire a different persona.” Consumption plays a role to construct the self in various social contexts. Wattanasuwan (2005, p. 180) offers an example that is, “a businessman can magically be another person by wearing a leather outfit, instead of his business suit and riding a Harley-Davidson, instead of driving his BMW.” In this vein, it is important to understand what material possessions signify as well as their meanings which are grounded in their social context. The making of consumption choices is not just central to self-identity but is also about facilitating the self in socialisation, more specifically, it situates the self in a diversity of social contexts (Wattanasuwan, 2005).

2.1.3.2 The collective level of consumption

Understanding the socialness in material goods identifies the need and importance of understanding consumption at the collective level. In other words, consumers engage in a diversity of consumption practices occurred not only by their individual needs and wants, but also by others such as reference groups. As the traditional view of consumer behaviour was based on the concept of utility maximisation, it focused extensively on an individual’s consumption behaviour, bringing an idea of an individual’s rational decision-making model (Foxall, 1983; Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994; Solomon, 1996). Consumption dealt with an individual’s personal behaviour which ignored the aspect of collective consumption and its relationship with the self. However, it is important to consider the influence of culture and value system of the society that the consumer lives within (Doyle, 2011). Consumers live in a social world so that they are influenced by the culture and value of the social world. Connected to this, consumption can
symbolically be employed in order to obtain a sense of belonging to a variety of social
groups such as ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983), ‘neo-tribes’ (Maffesoli,
1986) or ‘consumption-oriented subcultural groups’ (Schouten and MaAlexander, 1995).
For instance, neo-tribes are composed of heterogeneous people in terms of age, sex and
income who are linked by shared experience, the same emotion and a common passion
(Cova and Cova, 2001). In other words, individuals can form or belong to a tribe which
is a kind of a network of people who have an interest in a particular product or brand
such as a group of skaters. Moreover, as various subcultural studies such as punks (Fox,
1987), mountain men (Belk and Costa, 1998) or biker cultures (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) have shown, consumers achieve their identity projects through
socialisation into the subcultural groups, learning and acquiring the group identity and
negotiating their individual distinctiveness not only to the in-group but also to the out-
group (Kates, 2002). There are also various types of consumer groups which attempt to
prevent malpractices perpetuated in the marketplace and keep their rights. For instance,
Consumer VOICE (2013) explains itself as a voluntary action group which promotes
the right choices in a volatile and dynamic marketplace by providing consumer
education for all through integrating experiential good practices and scientific
knowledge for the safety and health of consumers and the environment.

Kates (2002, p. 398) notes that “consumer practices are read and displayed with
interpretive frameworks that incorporate explicit concerns about inclusion, exclusion,
social meaning, classification of people and objects, and the privileged status of this
knowledge.” In this way, our consumption practices of certain material goods
contribute to align ourselves with those who share the same or similar possessions. This
alignment symbolically creates a group.

To synthesise, buying of course is only rarely a functional act and it more often is a
symbolic action where values and meanings are constantly created and recreated
(Simon, 2011). As Bauman (1992, p. 223) puts it, “consumption is not just a matter of
satisfying material greed, of filling your stomach. It is a question of manipulating
symbols for all sorts of purposes. On the level of the life-world, it is for the purpose of
constructing identity, constructing self, and constructing relations with others.”
2.1.4 Understanding ethical consumption from a socio-cultural perspective

Ethical consumption refers to the notion of ‘good consumption’, playing a role to make an influence not only on society but also on the consumers’ daily lives (Thompson, 2011). Shaw and Riach (2011, p. 1062) argue that, “ethical consumption is situated in a rather complex world view where ‘choice’ becomes not simply a market ideal but a key tenet in how ethical consumers define, mould and create themselves and others.” In common with studies of consumers more broadly, ethical consumers are seen as human beings who interact with the material world around them through consumption (Kozinets, 2002a) and present their identities (Elliott and Davies, 2006). Ethical consumers may choose particular ethical products and interact with them. Ethical products can show their identities, namely who they are and what they are interested in. Ethical goods can be central to how individuals express themselves (Shaw and Riach, 2011). In this way, ethical consumption plays the socio-cultural role of consumption. Ethical brands represent authenticity, self-identity and one’s social positioning within the arena of consumption (Shaw and Riach, 2011). Connected to this, Barnett et al. (2005a) identify that ethical consumption is a socio-cultural expression of an ethical consumer identity rather than a simple choice of ethical products; for instance it is not unusual for consumers to deliver an ethical message by emphasising their purchase of fairly traded tea or coffee by putting it in Cafedirect mugs, or by displaying posters on kitchen cupboard doors.

Understanding ethical consumption from a socio-cultural perspective implies that ethical consumption can be presented in various forms which go beyond purchasing ethical products (Harper and Makatouni, 2002). However, it does not mean that ethical consumers live completely outside the marketplace. Shaw and Riach (2011, p. 1058) find that what ethical consumers pursue still takes place within the main market system and they demonstrate this with their empirical data:

“I don’t know, it’s something that you don’t want to be involved in but then you are. All the time every day, I mean it’s almost every day that you end up opening your wallet to purchase something or are involved in the marketplace in some way. So
it’s sort of like, it’s hard to get away from it unless you lived a very isolated lifestyle. It’s very hard to live outside, so you’ve got to make the best of it and your relationship to it.” (Mandy)

As most lives are not self-sufficient, people cannot entirely leave the marketplace. Dobscha and Ozanne’s (2001, p. 207) study focuses extensively on trivial actions in daily lives even though they are limited to the environmentally sensitive issues. They find that:

“Decisions about whether to drive, walk, or take public transportation may be low involvement for most people, but these participants consider the environmental impact of these choices. Their concerns are presented through trivial actions by avoiding many of the conveniences that average consumers take for granted. For example, Robin avoids all flea and tick products for her animals. Laura and Rachel never eat at restaurants where the leftovers are packaged in Styrofoam. Dana and Terry eschew products like dryer sheets and do not use a dryer in the warmer months. They also avoid many paper products (e.g., cups, plate, towels, napkins).”

What becomes clear is that ethical consumption is embedded in the mundane consumption and cannot evade the market even if some of the consumers’ ethical concerns relate directly to market dynamics and practices.

A non-profit, tax-exempt charitable organisation The Nature Conservancy which focuses on protecting ecologically important land, water for nature and people, also offers some ideas that people can easily do in their daily lives. On their website, the section of ‘Everyday Environmentalist’ introduces small actions everyone can do such as carrying re-usable water bottles (Fields, 2013). In particular, Melissa Weigel, who is an associate director of philanthropy for the Conservancy’s Pennsylvania Chapter, puts emphasis on bringing one’s own re-usable coffee mug. She concerns about the seriousness of using disposable goods such as paper or plastic cups, arguing that, “16 billion paper cups are used for coffee every single year. This translates to over 6.5
million trees cut down, 4 billion gallons of water wasted, and enough energy used to power nearly 54,000 homes for a year.” Moreover she offers detailed benefits of using re-usable cups not only to individuals but also to society. She says, “plus, many coffee shops offer discounts to customers that bring their own mugs (at Starbucks, it’s a 10 cent discount). More importantly, though, by switching from paper cups to re-usable mugs, you’ll also help save paper, reduce chlorine used to bleach cups and lessen your contribution to landfills.”

Small actions in everyday situations enable everyone to live in a much more ethical way. O’Rourke (2006, p. 291) also claims that, “ethical consumption is about taking the time to look beyond the clean, glossy packaging to the background of what is presented, and making choices and purchases based on that knowledge.” In other words, without leaving the marketplace, we can think of various ways to conduct ethical consumption and for this, understanding of day-to-day practices continues to be significant. We can also re-think what we are doing so that ethical meanings can be found in everyday practices. As the above example shows, having a cup of coffee includes a lot of ethical issues from the choice of ethically produced coffee, the choice of receptacle for coffee, to the after-use value. In this vein, the way to conduct ethical consumption can be found in various situations in our consumption practices.

This thesis finds that everyday practices have been highlighted by activists but they are relatively ignored by academics. In this vein, this thesis attempts to conduct an empirical investigation of various forms of ethical consumption in daily lives in order to re-examine and re-construct the complex dynamics of ethical consumption.

2.1.5 Consumer activism in mundane consumption

We apparently cannot live without consumption. People are engaged in the whole processes of consumption every day, from the information seeking of particular goods to purchasing, consuming, and abandoning them. Therefore, the aspect of mundane and everyday consumption is significant. Coupland (2005) also asserts the importance of mundane consumption by investigating the everyday familiarity and taken-for-granted
mundaneness of households and household objects. In our everyday life, consumption owns a function to construct and express out self-concepts as well as to identify our associations with others (Wallendorf and Arnold, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Elliott, 1997). However these studies have often focused on important, expensive, not frequently purchased or what we might see as high-involvement goods and brands. Little attention has been given to the mundane consumption.

Shaw and Riach (2011) focus on the everyday consumption practices arguing that consumers who significantly consider economic and animal welfare concerns seek to modify their diets to varying degrees such as reducing their meat consumption, purchasing free-range or organic animal products, or adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet. This demonstrates ethical consumption is a symbolic concept, more specifically a socio-cultural expression in our daily lives in that consumers’ beliefs and voices are transformed to particular types of ethical consumption practices. This is akin to consumers’ social and political activism which consumers strategically or tactically enact the socio-cultural and ideological conditions through their consumption practices.

2.1.5.1 Consumer resistance

‘What we choose to have’ has shown the reflection of our ethos and beliefs. ‘What we try not to have’ also implies a significant meaning in terms of understanding consumption as our symbolic project of the self (Hogg and Mitchell, 1996; Gould et al., 1997). Woodman (2011) argues that it is important not to do something unethical rather than doing something ethical. For instance, using a re-usable cup is an ethical behaviour and at the same time, it avoids doing something unethical such as the use of plastic cup. However, ‘doing something ethical’ does not necessarily mean ‘not to do something unethical’. For example, we choose to buy Fair Trade coffee in order to do something ethical. Having Fair Trade coffee is ethical in terms of considering labour issues but it still includes unethical problems such as the environmental or political issues. To avoid something unethical also does not necessarily mean to do something ethical but it at least does not bring unethical issues.
Making a particular choice means a refusal of something. By the same token, a choice of a particular product means a refusal of another particular product. Hogg and Mitchell (1996) claim that consumption resistance such as abandonment, avoidance or aversion of particular consumption makes an influence on our self-creation project. Consumer resistance is expressed by the acts of opposing or escaping a dominant force exerted by certain actors, behaviours, and devices (Roux, 2007).

Boycott is a prominent example which is “the refusal of a government or public groups and consumers to buy certain goods from a country or company” (Doyle, 2011, p. 43). Refusing to purchase products of McDonald’s or Nike is a famous case to reveal one’s hostile attitude towards America and capitalism. There are more radical and revolutionary forms such as protests or demonstrations. Animal Rights UK (2014) which promotes and assists the grassroots animal rights movement and any associated events, actions or protests in the United Kingdom plans to conduct an anti-fur weekend of action against Burberry.

However, recently consumer resistance is not only presented by the radical and extreme forms of activism but also expressed by a subtle and quiet way in our daily lives. Ulver-Sneistrup et al. (2011) investigate ordinary consumption practices in order to understand consumer resistance and marketplace ideologies rather than focusing on highly pronounced consumer resistance such as activist communities or specific brand antagonists or protagonists. The presentation of consumer resistance in a very personal and quiet level can easily be noticed in our daily lives and at the same time, they may be easily overlooked as well. For instance, some vegetarians choose not to eat meat in order to reveal their belief in animal protection. A committed Muslim refuses to consume alcohol or non-halal food to maintain his/her religious self.

In this sense, this thesis argues that importance lies not in focusing on obtaining a kind of ‘magnificent meaning’ of consumption but in understanding ‘micro-meanings’ in our everyday consumption by looking at how we negotiate, interpret and construct meaningfulness in our every consumption practices. Further discussions of consumer resistance will be held in section 2.5.3.1.
2.1.5.2 Consumer creativity

Finally, there is a relationship between consumer resistance and consumer creativity. Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) focus on consumer creativity as another form of consumer resistance. They demonstrate how consumers de-commodify mass-produced branded food items by transforming them into ‘homemade dishes’ which are socially appropriate food dishes in relation to the rituals of Thanksgiving. As briefly mentioned above, an emergence of modisumers in Korea who modify particular products based on their own tastes (Moon, 2014) is similar to this (see more details in section 2.1.3). In terms of modifying branded products which are involved in ‘de-branding’ or ‘un-branding’ rituals (Levy, 1996; Perzanowski, 2010), this phenomenon is considered to be an expression of consumer resistance which does not follow the original recipes for the products, and it is interconnected with consumer creativity.

The boundaries between consumers and producers become vague as consumers directly or indirectly are involved in the production processes of particular products and services. Of course, consumers do not or cannot get physically involved in all stages of production from the cultivation of ingredients to the manufacturing and packing processes. However, consumers experience a certain level of involvement in productive processes that creates value rather than destroying it (Humphereys and Grayson, 2008). For example a furniture company, IKEA sells unassembled furniture with a range of reasonable prices so that consumers must put it together themselves. Then, the complete furniture is a joint work of the producer (IKEA) and consumer, accommodating the value-creation process (Humphereys and Grayson, 2008). In Firat et al.’s (1995, p. 52) words, consumption is “a productive process” because the “consumer’s identity and self are produced and reproduced” via consumption, and therefore “production continues during the moments of consumption” (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993, pp. 235-236). In this case, the value creation does not necessarily distinguish the two roles of producer and consumer, bringing the potential impact of prosumption, co-creation, co-production, and related activities (Humphereys and Grayson, 2008).
2.1.6 Summary

Ethical consumption has become a social phenomenon embracing numerous ethical consumption studies in various disciplines. In particular, ethical consumption studies in the field of management have extensively focused on ethical buying behaviours. Thus, the overwhelming view of ethical consumption has favoured and is limited to an individual’s choice of ethical products.

However, consumption is a complex topic which not only talks about buying behaviours but also deals with the meanings behind them. As consumers construct and present meanings and values through consumption practices, consumption plays a role of signaling the consumers’ identities. This includes the social aspect because people interact with others through consumption practices and it ultimately constructs a consumer culture.

By the same token, ethical consumption is value-driven in which consumers present who they are and what they are interested in. Ethical consumers not only choose to purchase particular ethical products but also conduct their own activities which are considered to be ethical. In particular, a myriad of forms of ethical consumption practices can be found in our daily lives. This means ethical consumption is not just about the choice of ethical products but it is much more complex.

However there has been a bias in academic literature that needs to be readdressed. Ideas and concepts that are common in other areas of consumer research have been neglected in the study of ethical consumers. There is a limited but persuasive indication that consumers create and present their beliefs and voices through their micro-practices in mundane consumption. This sometimes can be seen as different from the mainstream marketplace. In terms of making a distinction from the structures of domination, this accommodates the notion of consumer resistance and consumer creativity. There are few studies to examine this kind of ‘subtle’ resistance, most notably Ulver-Sneistrup et al. (2011) whose study suggests there is great potential value in examining the everyday and looking beyond overt political activism such as boycotts. This study also
emphasises the discussion of consumer creativity in terms of constructing and presenting the consumers’ identities, ethos and beliefs. This will be further discussed in the next section by dealing with Veblen’s theory.
2.2 Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption

2.2.1 Introduction

In the previous section we examined claims that the socio-cultural perspective of consumption is significant in order to understand the complex dynamics of ethical consumption. In relation to this, Duesenberry (1949) explores that households not only care about their own consumption level but also about their consumption level relative to those of other households in their ‘reference group’ (Leibenstein, 1950). This is called the ‘demonstration effect’, which explains a phenomenon of suffering loss which is known to occur when one’s relative consumption declines while others’ consumption levels rise (Arrow and Dasgupta, 2009). Possessions themselves have no meaning but it has to be displayed and observable to others which are based on the social context. Doane (2006) asserts that contemporary scholarship on socio-cultural consumption has its roots in the work of Veblen (1899/1994). Veblen (1899) develops an evolutionary framework, that is, conspicuous consumption in which preferences are determined socially in relation to the positions of individuals in the social hierarchy (Trigg, 2001). This approach is in line with the sociological aspect of consumption. By moving away from the classical models of consumer behaviour which focus on individual decision-making, utilitarianism and cognitive processes, Veblen has been acclaimed to open a broader socio-cultural paradigm of the consumer. In particular, the notion of conspicuous consumption has been widely embraced by popular culture and everyday discourse mainly adopted by culturally inclined consumer researchers (Patsiaouras and Fitchett, 2009). Even though there is an argument that the literatures of consumer research and marketing seem to have paid scarce attention to Veblen and his theory (Mason, 1998; O’Cass and McEwen, 2004), it is well worth re-visiting Veblen’s ideas in order to further understand social accounts of consumption.

2.2.2 Veblen’s conspicuous consumption

Veblen argued that economic thought could be developed further by comprehending the evolutionary nature and interrelations of political, social and economic institutions
In his book, Veblen frequently used the terms ‘natural selection’ and ‘struggle for existence’, explaining how individuals progress under the influence of evolutionary selection, considering how the mental processes of learning, imitating and acting are imparted through instincts, habits and human culture (Patsiaouras and Fitchett, 2009). According to Gopnik (1999), in the era of pre-industrial predatory barbarianism, the human focused on acquiring more women, slaves and acres of land, which symbolised the evidence of ownership through wars and hunting, and pervaded social life. However, in an industrial society, there is no obvious way other than seeing where people shop and what they buy. Patsiaouras and Fitchett (2009) explain this phenomenon, arguing that in the new phase of socio-cultural evolution, the ‘struggle for subsistence’ has been replaced by the ‘struggle for wealth’. O’Cass and McEwen (2004) also argue that one of the strongest measures of social success and achievement in the consumer society is the acquisition of material goods. Veblen (1899) introduced the notion of conspicuous consumption, describing extravagant spending on products as an intention of chiefly displaying wealth and thus signalling status. In his book *The Theory of The Leisure Class*, Veblen (1899, p. 69) says that “unproductive consumption of goods is honourable, primarily as a mark of prowess and a perquisite of human dignity; secondarily, it becomes substantially honourable in itself, especially the consumption of the more desirable things.” The possession of wealth does not aim solely to satisfy a consumer’s physical and intellectual needs, but it also strives to fulfil the primordial motive of emulation which is for Veblen “probably the strongest, most alert and persistent of the economic motives proper” (Veblen, 1899, p. 110). This is in line with Veblen’s particular emphasis on the concept of waste and surplus that does not require those who are financially affluent to keep working and this makes a clear differentiation from the working class. Thus, individuals who acquire more properties, becoming wealthy, and can be wasteful are considered to have higher positions in the social hierarchy.

Veblen understands the presentation of conspicuousness in consumption practices as a purposive conduct in which the instincts of emulation and predation is transformed and status considerations predominate (Chaudhuri and Majumdar, 2006). In other words, consumption practices are also determined by social needs such as prestige (Grubb and
Grathwohl, 1967; Belk, 1988) rather than just material needs. Leibenstein (1950) also argues that consumers purchase status goods in order to distinguish from other consumers or imitate them, resulting in a ‘snob’ or ‘bandwagon’ effect, respectively. People buy status brands which have high-perceived quality, luxury, prestige and/or high class attached to them (Shermach, 1997) as they indicate a visual representation of status. By consuming these types of brands or products, consumers expect to display a certain level of status and possessions, exercising a snob effect. The case of Chinese shoppers today is a prominent example, in which, for instance, the young who love to flaunt their status shout “look, I am rich” by purchasing prominent logo-oriented luxury goods (The Economist, 2004). A bandwagon effect can be noticed by so-called followers who attempt to imitate these kinds of consumption practices in order to achieve similar or the same levels of status, image or identity. These consumption practices are caused because an individual’s position or status in society is judged based on a display of wealth by other members of society (Trigg, 2001). In other words, the ownership of property symbolises the acquisition of status and honour, then no property means the absence of status. This accommodates a hierarchical structure in the consumer society. In this sense, Veblen (1899/1994) considers conspicuous consumption as the most important factor in determining consumer behaviour for all social classes because it shows and puts emphasis on the relative social performance of members in society.

### 2.2.3 Historical features and conspicuous consumption

In American history, the prestige of wasteful and lavish consumption was manifestly seen in the gilded age when the leisure class was written and debated. ‘The Gilded Age’ refers to the period of enormous changes in the United States as the country was transformed by the forces of immigration, industrialisation, corporatization, urbanisation, mechanisation, and a revolution in transportation (Shrock, 2004). The term ‘Gilded Age’ was coined by Twain and Warner (2007) in their book The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today. Here, the name referred to the process of gilding an object with a superficial layer of gold and was meant to make fun of ostentatious display while playing on the term ‘golden age’. The Gilded Age resulted in the creation of modern,
mass urban society that embraced leisure as one of the best things in life (Shrock, 2004). During the 1870s and 1880s, the United States economy grew at the fastest rate in its history, with real wages, wealth, GDP, and capital formation all increasing rapidly (Kirkland, 1961). In this period, Veblen described the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption as individuals’ efforts “to excel in pecuniary standing” or “in the struggle to outdo one another the city population pushed their normal standard of conspicuous consumption to a higher point” (Veblen, 1899, p. 53). Thus, for Veblen, all social change was the result of mere animal-like adaptation, devoid of conscious decision making concerning means and ends. Even though there is an argument that conspicuous consumption is an unconscious action which is motivated by human’s instincts of emulation, if considering phases of the times, we can also argue that conspicuous consumption can be seen as a deliberate and conscious action to achieve the objective of status enhancement (Chaudhuri and Majumdar, 2006). The pursuit of obtaining status through consumption practices is in line with the role of social performances. Therefore, it is important to re-examine and critically review Veblen’s conspicuous consumption in terms of understanding the socio-cultural role of consumption and specifically social performance.

2.2.4 Criticisms of conspicuous consumption

Even though Veblen’s theory has been acclaimed by economists and sociologists, Trigg (2001) argues that the theory of conspicuous consumption has been subjected to considerable criticism outside of the mainstream. Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) suggest the needs to re-establish the theory with a reflection of the contemporary management circumstances. We can think of the limitations of Veblen’s theory theoretically, academically, and historically.

2.2.4.1 Disregard the private pleasure of consumption

First of all, Veblen seems to believe that the only motivation of consumption which exists as an absolute entity is to create the stratification in the society. Trigg (2001) analyses the key point of conspicuous consumption, arguing that a hierarchy develops
in which some people own property and other do not; to own property is to have status and honour, a position of esteem in this hierarchy, thus to have no property is to have no status. However, Veblen seems to downplay the pursuit of the private pleasure or the personal motivation of consumption behaviours. For instance, Olen (2013) describes today’s mothers’ possessions, saying that you can easily find a perfectly coiffed and dressed yummy mummy pushing an infant in a $900 Bugaboo stroller, complete with a $200-plus diaper bag slung over her shoulder on the streets of any major American city. Possessing a $900 branded baby stroller can be interpreted as an example of conspicuous consumption in terms of presenting one’s high level of financial property. However, the mother who purchases this particular item may have a personal motivation or a specific purpose of buying a particular type of baby stroller which is light but strong and safe, made with special steel. Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) also elucidate the existing preoccupation in terms of understanding conspicuous consumption, discovering that people can choose to buy and display any product which is different merely for the sake of being different from other consumers, rather than to display their wealth or social status. Postrel (2003) argues that the status critique sees only two possible sources of value: function and meaning. It denies the existence or importance of aesthetic pleasure, and the many meanings and associations that can flow from that pleasure. Connected to this, the following example is noteworthy:

“Frank, the cultural analyst, writes that, “the status symbol of the 1990s has been the restaurant stove.” Fancy stoves are, in his opinion, entirely about keeping up with the neighbours’ kitchens. To bolster his argument, he quotes a woman who owns a $7,000 stove, despite rarely cooking at home. Does she say she felt social pressure to buy an overpriced appliance? Does she say she wanted to stand out from the crowd? No, she describes the stove as a work of art: “you think of it as a painting that makes the kitchen look good.” The supposedly damning quotation demonstrates the opposite of what Frank maintains: The woman sees the stove primarily not as a status symbol but as an aesthetic pleasure... Obviously the stoves serve something besides functional needs. But that ‘something’ is more complex and sensual than status, combining a vision of an ideal life of home cooking with the immediate pleasures of beauty and power. Whatever status a
As this description shows, the consumption practices and the possession of products cannot be simply understood as an activity for the achievement of status. Rather, the expression of the personal taste which is in line with Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of taste and cultural capital (for details, see section 2.3) or the pursuit of private pleasure cannot be underestimated when understanding consumption practices. This will be further explored in the following section, taking into account the phases of the contemporary times.

2.2.4.2 Disregard the time and place

Theorists such as Lury (1996) and Slater (1997) suggest that conspicuous consumption was the main reason for consumer behaviour in the age when Veblen coined the phrase, but in intervening years, other motivations offered a better explanation of people’s consumption activity. Heibroner (1953) criticises Veblen’s approach in the book *The Worldly Philosophers*, arguing that while Veblen’s theories are valid for his time (the 1890s and the Gilded Age) and his location (the United States in general, and the city of Chicago in particular), these theories are now outdated. In current periods, because of a growing purchasing power, an era of transitional capitalism (Holt, 1998), and the industrialisation process adopted by manufacturers, products that used to be considered exclusive (salmon, perfumes, first-class hotel services) are now widely consumed by the public (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993). Thus, goods are becoming relatively more affordable as disposable income levels keep rising. Taylor and Tilford (2000) also support this phenomenon, arguing that in industrial countries, the standard of living has risen so that items considered luxuries a few decades ago are common among the middle class today. Essec Business School (2014) also claims that luxury isn’t just for the elite anymore because traditional ‘luxury’ brands have been reaching out to a broader spectrum of society and finding innovative ways to appeal to an aspirational clientele. In this vein, status judgments based on the goods one owns are of little value (Holt, 1998). Consumption is not just about an attempt to achieve a competitive
hierarchy of social status; rather it has to be understood wider than that, in relation to a means of establishing a ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1984) (for details, see section 2.3.3.3).

2.2.4.3 Disregard the needs to go beyond status-oriented consumption

Finally, Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption has been understood and interpreted by numerous researchers through a rather limited notion of status emulation (see Baudrillard, 1988; Douglas and Isherwood, 1996). Campbell (1995) investigates this phenomenon in the academics, arguing that post-1950s literature on Veblen continues to extend the concepts mainly on the original logic of status signalling without showing any interest in incorporating other psychological or socio-cultural constructs. Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) also criticise that the literatures focus mainly on explaining status signalling, merely using different nomenclature, jargon and concepts: Hirsch’s (1976) positional goods, Ng’s (1987) diamond goods, Congleton’s (1989) status games, Ireland’s (1994) market for status signals in the presence of visible goods, Pesendorfer’s (1995) fashion cycles, etc. Purchasing behaviour is not just about impressing other people or displaying status and success (Davies et al., 2012). Therefore, if considering the needs of understanding Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption wider than the status-oriented consumption behaviours, more diverse approaches have to be considered.

To synthesise, it seems significant to re-visit Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption with a reflection of the contemporary business circumstances. Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) also argue that understanding conspicuous consumption is still not complete, and it is evident in the continuing interests of researchers. This thesis attempts to re-visit the notion of conspicuous consumption, particularly focusing on the socio-cultural role of consumption. Dubois and Duquesne (1993) also point out that in subsequent years many social scientists start to explore the various facets of socio-cultural influence on consumption behaviour. This may start with going beyond the status-oriented consumption practices of Veblen’s conspicuous consumption. This thesis argues that Veblen’s theory plays an important role in understanding how
consumers present their identities through consumption practices. This view also opens a discussion of how they differentiate themselves from others or construct the group identity with those who have the similar consumption practices. Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) emphasise that when consumption moves to the symbolic realm, distinctive display can be made even with less expensive material possessions, still communicating the symbol of distinctiveness. Moreover, it is noticeable that the way of displaying or presenting something which can show who you are, is changing as well. Rather than taking a manifestly visible way, just like what Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption says, a more invisible, subtle or even hidden way of presentation is being considered. For instance, in the past, buying exclusive branded luxury goods embossed with logos and labels was a way of presenting one’s wealth. However, in the 21st century a more sophisticated and moderate way of consumption such as investing in new technology (e.g. spend money to clone one’s pet cat) is noticeable (The Economist, 2005). Connected to this, we can introduce the notion of inconspicuous consumption which will be further explored in the next section.

2.2.5 The notion of inconspicuous consumption

The notion of inconspicuous consumption recently has been employed in the field of consumer research and marketing (Shove and Warde, 2002; Granot and Brashear, 2007; Berger and Ward, 2010). When we firstly see the term ‘inconspicuous consumption’, we can jump to a conclusion that it is totally opposite to conspicuous consumption. This is because the meaning of ‘inconspicuous’ is by and large understood as ‘not clearly visible or attracting attention’ (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014b). However, as it is a relatively new concept, it has not yet been fully defined but rather is being understood in many different ways.

2.2.5.1 Ordinary goods and services

Shove and Warde (2002) employ the phrase ‘inconspicuous consumption’ to refer to the routine normative consumption of ‘ordinary’ goods and services: for example, purchasing logo-oriented goods but for invisible products such as underwear, Jacuzzi in
one’s bathroom, etc. Even though wearing Calvin Klein underwear symbolises the wearer’s wealth and luxury in being able to afford expensive undergarments, the labelled item cannot overtly flaunt the wearer’s wealth like a Calvin Klein shirt or jeans. Here, focusing on goods and services which can be found in mundane and daily consumption is significant because Veblen’s theory deals only with peculiar or luxurious goods which are different from ordinary goods. Sullivan and Gershuny (2004) draw attention to the fact that less research has been directed at ‘ordinary’ consumption practices than at the more ‘glamorous’ areas of consumption. They focus on both the intangibleness and satisfaction which may be obtained by the mere knowledge of possession that symbolises the imaginary future. For example, they identify a form of consumption in which purchases of expensive leisure goods are made, but these goods are subsequently stored away due to lack of time. Even though they cannot use the purchased goods, they are still satisfied with their consumption because of an intention to use them at some imagined future time when there will be time. This understanding follows those of ‘fantasy’, ‘imagined’ or ‘idealised’ consumption in which purchases are imaginary rather than real.

2.2.5.2 Subtle signals

Berger and Ward (2010) also examine inconspicuous consumption but introduce the concept of subtle signals. While some products may not use explicit brand identification, their design, shape and other aspects may allow insiders to recognise the brand. Importantly, it actually requires a similar level of tastes (or the cultural capital) which may be indecipherable by outsiders. Their study draws attention to the social symbolism of inconspicuous consumption and in this way extends the work of Shove and Warde (2002) and Sullivan and Gershuny (2004). They focus on the role of inconspicuous consumption in that it requires a certain level of knowledge or tastes so that only a few people can have the ability to decode the value of one’s possessions. For instance, people in the West buy more discreetly branded luxury goods (e.g. non-logo goods) identifiable only by those ‘in the know’ rather than presenting prominent logos or brand names (The Economist, 2004). Some people can recognise particular products which have no logos or brand names by noticing particular types of materials used or
particular patterns of the design. The role of subtle and hidden cues is particularly noticeable, opening a discussion of ‘new luxury’ in the 21st century (*The Economist*, 2005).

2.2.5.3 New luxury

Granot and Brashear (2007) define ‘inconspicuous consumption’ as one of seven categories which explain the notion of ‘new luxury’. In their empirical study, they investigated the characteristics of inconspicuous consumption, and found that participants purposely choose goods that are of high quality and relatively expensive but that do not display any visual brand elements. *The Financial Times* (2009) explains the new desire for inconspicuous consumption by citing the following incident:

“In November, Net-a-Porter, the online fashion retailer, began offering customers a ‘brown bag service’ delivering items in unmarked brown bags. Since then, and as customers come back to the luxury end of the market in greater numbers, other companies have followed Net-a-Porter's lead.”

Connected to this, designer Karl Lagerfeld has called it ‘The New Modesty’ and others term it ‘the death of bling’ (*The Financial Times*, 2009). This is in line with the current trend of the global luxury consumers who become less interested in acquiring conspicuous symbols and more interested in the actual worth of products even though they are hidden and hardly noticeable by others (Bellaiche *et al.*, 2010).

The analyses above show that inconspicuous consumption is understood and interpreted in various ways. However, it is undeniable that inconspicuous consumption is involved in the symbolic realm (both self-symbolism and social symbolism) of consumption which is in line with the concept of conspicuous consumption. Even though Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption has been challenged, debated and modified in the current society, the aspect of consumers’ motivation to make themselves distinguished (which is emerged from an instinct of emulation (Veblen, 1899) but may be not in this case) is emphasised in the understanding of inconspicuous consumption and
demonstrates its relevance today. The aspect of making a distinction from others includes the notion of status, but it is not just about Veblen’s vertical form of status such as the social hierarchy. Status can be the horizontal one which is more like a ‘unique’ group. This is similar to the characteristics of subcultural groups which will be further discussed in section 2.5: members create and present particular values and identities, constructing their own social boundaries (Beverland et al., 2010). As inconspicuous consumption builds on the notion of conspicuous consumption, this thesis understands inconspicuous consumption as a successive and expanded form of conspicuous consumption.

2.2.6 Summary

Consumers have different perceptions toward consumption, shifting from a simple purchasing activity or an exchange activity for possession to the means of defining the self. In other words, consumption becomes the means through which individuals define their self-images for themselves as well as to others. The importance of self and social images has given rise to the phenomenon where products serve as symbols, are evaluated, purchased, and consumed based on their symbolic content (Zaltman and Wallendorf, 1979). By the same token, ethical consumption is the presentation of ethical values and ethos through consumption practices which show the self and social symbolism.

Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption plays an important role in understanding how individuals present and perform themselves through consumption practices. Veblen (1899) explained the notion of conspicuous consumption, focusing on extravagant spending on products because this is the way of displaying one’s wealth and thus signalling status. While wealth display may not be as relevant or central to understand contemporary consumers, Veblen’s contribution to understand the signalling and display remains relevant. Conspicuous consumption shows the relative social performance of members in society.

The notion of inconspicuous consumption as a successive and expanded form of
conspicuous consumption is also explored in this thesis. Inconspicuous consumption has been employed in the limited context such as the luxury, household brand or leisure industry (Sullivan and Gershuny, 2004; Coupland, 2005; Berger and Ward, 2010). Inconspicuous consumption has not been used in the context of ethical consumption but it would seem of potential relevance because ethical consumers pursue particular value-based consumption practices which ultimately construct their own social world. In other words, inconspicuous consumption may help to explore how ethical consumers make social distinction, constructing their ethical identities and presenting their ethical ethos and values through ethical consumption practices. In particular, the role of subtleness has an importance because it demonstrates how members of a particular group share and build the authentic group identity and membership (Hebdige, 1979; Kidder, 2005; Berger and Ward, 2010). Berger and Ward (2010) emphasise that without any explicit identification, consumers make themselves subtly distinct from others, valuing other aspects which can symbolise a certain level of taste in which the majority rarely decipher. As Hebdige (1979) shows, individuals with domain specific style may prefer subtle forms because it can be more authentic by restricting imitation by outsiders, making them in-group tastes hard to copy. An authentic style performance is implicit as is described as natural, and most often unnoticed unless there are errors in the performance (Elliott and Davies, 2006). The group members take an authentic style for granted so they don’t even recognise it because they are too familiar with it. Here, the notion of style can be interpreted as a particular taste in terms of holding a function to make a distinction from others.

Berger and Ward (2010) argue that many cultural tastes require particular cultural capital to consume because cultural capital acts as an important status resource which expresses distinction through embodied tastes (Holt, 1998). As the notion of cultural capital which was coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) offers an influential attempt to understand the context of inconspicuous consumption and the social patterning of consumption, it will be covered in section 2.3.
2.3 Bourdieu’s theory of taste

2.3.1 Introduction

Numerous consumer societies have always had cultures in the sense that they have produced distinctive cultural products, artefacts, buildings and distinctive ways of life (Featherstone, 2007). More specifically, people seek to display their individuality and their sense of style through the choice of a particular range of goods and their subsequent customising or personalising of these goods (Lury, 1996). For instance, men who wish to be seen as particularly macho choose to purchase Harley Davidson motorbikes (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and Marlboro cigarettes, which present a symbolic meaning of masculinity (Kimmel and Aronson, 2004). Young people try to imitate well-known celebrities’ fashion styles or behaviours in order to look like them or present themselves as a fan (Whang, 2004). Then a particular taste or sense of style plays a role in making them distinct from others by constructing a particular image or identity through consumption practices. It is easy to see how style sits easily with the role of subtle signals which are associated with inconspicuous consumption (Berger and Ward, 2010). In particular, the symbol of distinctiveness (Chaudhuri and Majumdar, 2006) opens a discussion about the requirement of a certain level of knowledge or tastes which Bourdieu (1984) extensively focuses on. The signs of distinction bring the issue of power relations and the social hierarchy in the social world. Lury (1996, p. 83) supports this, arguing that, “Bourdieu’s work is centrally concerned with social reproductions, that is, with how societies reproduce or maintain themselves over time, not simply as a set of individuals, but as individuals in certain groupings in certain relations of power to each other.”

This section discusses Bourdieu’s theory of distinction including social class, taste, habitus, forms of capital and lifestyles. It also looks at the choices people make which are in line with the different aesthetic tastes; for instance, one finds something aesthetically pleasing but others may have different views. By looking at the choices in everyday life, how it makes class segments and simultaneously constructs a system of power relations in the social world will be explored.
2.3.2 Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction*

Pierre Bourdieu was one of the leading French sociologists and philosophers, leaving an indelible mark on the field of sociology in the latter half of the 20th century (Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2005). Bourdieu’s *Distinction* which was published in 1979 illuminates the social systems of the middle classes in the modern world by conducting a vast ethnography of the French bourgeoisie. Like the theories of Veblen ([1899], 1970) in *the leisure class* (see details in section 2.2) or Simmel’s ([1940], 1957) theory of trickle-down status imitation, Bourdieu focuses on the social classification in the social world. We constantly make a decision between what we find aesthetically pleasing, and what we consider ugly. Bourdieu (1984) finds that the choices we make are all distinctions - that is, choices make a distinction from others, bringing classifications and in result, construct the social hierarchy.

Bourdieu (1986) argues that the aspect of making social classes is based on the acquirement of different types of resources which are seen as the forms of capital. This is because these resources play the role of cipher or code which represents one’s competence. For instance, one presents sophisticated tastes of art by possessing a rare work of art or knowing about them. This is not a simple buying activity, but it contains complex dynamics of individuals’ social behaviours (Goldthorpe, 2007). The one who possesses a rare art object may have a certain level of resources, ranging from artistic tastes which enable him/her to understand the value of the object and choose the valuable piece, and a certain level of financial resources to a network to get access to these art objects. All these processes create a distinction. In relation to this, to borrow Bourdieu’s (1984) argument, consumption is a process of communication that involves an act of deciphering or decoding so it helps to understand the processes at work for conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption. The capacity to ‘see’ is a function of the knowledge. In other words, a work of art is meaningful only for those who possess the cultural competence to decode it. Based on the capacity to see and decipher the code, classification is made and social classes are produced. The mechanism of social hierarchy among social classes is understood as follows; those who have more or are closer to particular resources dominate the field of cultural production, forming the
dominant class. Then those who are relatively low in having particular resources fall into the subordinate classes. In line with this, ethical consumers who are close to ethical values and ethos dominate the field of ethical consumption by presenting and sharing their ethical identities that ultimately constructs their own social world.

Goldthorpe (2007) argues that Bourdieu demonstrates not just the factual distribution of resources within the society which decides the social hierarchy, but also how the dominant class uses the resources to preserve their positions. Bourdieu (1998) realises this through the concept of capital and dispositions at the individual level, habitus at the meso (middle) level, and the field at the macro level. More specifically, the micro or individual level investigates how individuals draw on and attain different forms of capital in life. In the meso level, the relational aspects on the social structures are significantly considered, including how the individuals interact with others by utilising the resources they have. Finally, the macro level explores the overall environment that plays a role of ground in which the micro and meso level phenomena occur. A more detailed discussion about each level will be made in the following section.

2.3.3 Micro level: Forms of capital

BBC News education reporter, Sellgren (2013) finds that about one in three (32%) parents who are professional in England move home for good schools and they are more likely to pay for weekly music, drama or sporting lessons and activities outside school. It means that the professionals compared with the working-class or lower-income parents spend a huge amount of money for their children’s extracurricular education. They focus on the achievement of a certain level of cultural values through experiencing various out-of-school activities which also require financial resources and social networks. This article clearly shows the three different types of resources; economic, social and cultural capital Bourdieu (1984) sought to understand the different tastes in the social field. More specifically, Bourdieu maps out social and economic groups, investigating not only legitimated cultural practices but also lifestyles and consumption preferences of the respective social positions (Featherstone, 2007). Each capital will be discussed in detail because three types of capital help to understand
the meanings of ethical consumers’ pursuit and presentation of the ethical ethos and values through consumption practices.

2.3.3.1 Economic capital

First of all, Bourdieu (1986, p. 47) defines economic capital as “immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights”. It is normally considered to be the financial resources which are correlated with a taste for business meals, foreign cars, auctions, a second home, tennis, golf and galleries in daily lives. In the movie Pretty Woman, Edward Lewis, who is a rich business man illustrates his economic capital by choosing an expensive setting for his business meeting and showing his ability to afford it. The aspect of possessing particular goods or services which require one’s financial affordability plays a manifest role of making a distinction from others.

The role of economic capital cannot be ignored in the context of ethical consumption because the more niche ethical products are more expensive (Ethical Consumer, 2011a). This means buying ethical products requires a certain level of economic capital.

2.3.3.2 Social capital

Second, social capital also plays an important role in the dynamics of social class relations. The notion of social capital is defined as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119). In other words, social capital is considered to be a kind of membership in a group or networks of social connections. By the same token, consumers gather and interact with each other sharing their ethos, values and knowledge. A certain level of social capital practically exists as the tool to bring material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain the relationships among those who have the social capital (Sellgren, 2013).
2.3.3.3 Cultural capital

The concept of cultural capital has been rightly described as one of Bourdieu’s “signature concepts” (Lareau and Weininger, 2003, p. 568). Initially, the concept of cultural capital explains the high success rates for the children of educated parents (Prieur et al., 2008). Bourdieu and Passeron (1979, p. 17) explain its concept, stating, “not only do the more privileged students derive from their background of origin habits, skills, and attitudes which serve them directly in their scholastic tasks, but they also inherit from it knowledge and know-how, tastes, and a ‘good taste’ whose scholastic profitability is no less certain for being indirect.” Cultural capital is acquired by the unconscious, natural and spontaneous way rather than the learning processes which require conscious efforts. Trigg (2001, p 104) also defines cultural capital as “an accumulated stock of knowledge about the products of artistic and intellectual traditions which is learned through educational training and - crucially for Bourdieu - also through social upbringing.” Cultural capital is described as a set of socially rare and distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge, and practices.

Holt (1998) claims that cultural capital is articulated in all social fields as an important status resource. For instance, Ostrower (1998) uses the arts as cultural capital among elites. Yaish and Katz-Gerro (2012) conduct an empirical study which uses various genres in theatre plays, cinema, music, sports, and visual arts as the indicators of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) describes cultural capital by focusing on the space of lifestyles; for example, those with high levels of cultural capital but low levels of financial resources may display ‘highbrow’ tastes (going to art galleries or concerts), while those with the reverse pattern of resources may display a ‘lowbrow’ taste for expensive entertainment not requiring the cultural capital required for the ‘aesthetic’ gaze. Trigg (2001, p. 109) emphasises the importance of high cultural capital, arguing, “it is not displayed overtly, but rather is interpreted as being due to the individual merit that is naturally bestowed on each person.” In this sense, cultural capital allows people to gain the respect of, and to coordinate with others because it allows them to consume things that only people who have acquired certain abilities can actually consume (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998). Piacentini and Mailer (2004) support this argument,
stating that although an individual may have economic capital which enables the individual to consume certain brands and products, without the necessary skills associated with high cultural capital, they will not occupy a higher social position.

Bourdieu (1984) detects a constant struggle over the legitimacy of class cultures with groups, competing to establish their own preferences as superior. For instance, Davis (1992) argues that the rich dress modestly to differentiate themselves from the *nouveau riche* who are prone to opulent displays (also see Bourdieu’s (1984) discussion of bourgeois discretion; and Weber, 1904/2001). Brooks (2001, p. 97) also suggests that the educated elites engage in ‘one-downmanship’, rejecting traditional status symbols to avoid becoming materialists. He says, “while the moneyed elite (nouveau riche) go after items the lower classes could never purchase (e.g. yachts and caviar), educated elites often select the same items that the working class buys but in a rarefied form (e.g. free range chicken legs or heirloom potatoes from France). In doing so, the educated elite not only distinguish themselves from the moneyed elite but do so in ways that the moneyed elite are unlikely to copy.”

Cultural capital basically plays a role of stratifying society in terms of accommodating different lifestyles organised by the class positions. Wolfreys (2000) argues that in *Distinction* Bourdieu attempts to show how art and cultural consumption serves to legitimate social differences. While class analyses portray society as a one-dimensional hierarchy, Bourdieu paints a more complex picture of what he terms the social space, wherein economic and non-economic assets, termed cultural capital works together or against one another in the formation of social groups (Prieur et al., 2008).

Cultural capital also plays an important role in the context of ethical consumption. As discussed in section 2.1, ethical consumption is not just about purchasing ethical products but it can be understood and presented in various forms. Ethical consumption requires a certain level of cultural capital because the ways of presenting the ethical ethos and values are hardly noticed by those who don’t have the similar level of cultural capital.
2.3.4 Meso level: Habitus

The analysis of Bourdieu’s forms of capital above demonstrates that individuals are motivated by particular types and amounts of valued resources. For instance, children who are raised in a family of professional musicians are far more likely to develop their own music abilities than those who don’t have these kinds of backgrounds. This is because the children who are exposed to music in daily lives can acquire the know-how to interpret, criticise, and appreciate works of music. In this vein, types and volume of capital make an influence on shaping one’s perceptions, thought, and bodily comportment, that is called ‘Habitus’ (Swartz, 2002). The term *habitus* means ‘to have’ or ‘to hold’ which is motivated by Bourdieu’s attempt to address the question, how is human action regulated? (Swartz, 2002). Bourdieu (1990, p. 53) defines habitus as a system of “principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.” In other words, habitus is the unintended classificatory result of cultural codes as most signals of habitus are sent unconsciously (Lamont and Lareau, 1988). Related to this, Doane (2006, p. 88) describes habitus as “the engine that drives the practical activities of everyday life and begins with the family’s nearly indelible mark of culture: it is the inculcation of the class-based, familial ethos as habitual, not to be donned or doffed like an article of clothing.” In other words, certain habitus cannot be easily formed or structured by a simple imitation but they are naturally derived from unconscious decisions in some ways. As the example of children who are raised in a family of professional musician shows, a sense of music knowledge, taste or abilities can hardly be acquired by having private music lessons.

However, every individual belongs to particular groups or collectives in a multiple manner so an influence of others should not be ignored. Swartz (2002, p. 67) emphasises that, “although habitus is attached to the individual as a biological unit, habits stem from socialisation processes (internalisation) that are collective (family, class, status group, gender, etc.).” In this vein, Bourdieu’s habitus perspective should not be limited to individual habits but it has to be understood in the collective
dimension in which individuals are involved.

Bourdieu’s view of human action as practice stands in contrast to the prevailing view in American sociology that tends to see action as “purposive, rational, voluntaristic, or decisional” (Camic, 1986, p. 1040). Bourdieu claims that habitus derives from the predominately unconscious internalisation particularly during early childhood and this is the most important resource, governing human action (Swartz, 2002). People are differently experienced, represented, and constituted which causes cultural distinctions and this is the work of habitus. Then, habitus plays a role of a driving force of human conduct. However, for Bourdieu, habitus and capital do not fully explain human conduct but habitus accompanies a broader concept which is about the context where they generate action. This will be further explained in the following section.

2.3.5 Macro level: Field Theory

Habitus occupies particular spaces which Bourdieu’s (1984) field theory considers as a social arena namely an abstract space (rather than place). According to Swartz (2002), Bourdieu thinks that society is composed of complex arrangements of many fields such as the economic field, the artistic field, the religious field, the legal field and the political field, etc. One of the key characteristics of the field is its autonomy relative to other fields (Bourdieu, 1984). Individuals move in and out among various fields so fields offer constraints and opportunities which are mediated through the dispositions of habitus (Swartz, 2002). Shaw and Riach (2011, p. 1062) claim that, “capital exchange can occur, where resources in one field gains a value within another field.”

Shaw and Riach (2011) apply Bourdieu’s field theory to ethical consumption in order to see how individuals locate and negotiate their ethical consumption practices within wider fields of practice. Ethical consumers construct their own ethical spaces and at the same time they participate in other fields of consumption such as non-ethical marketplaces. This is because individuals enter fields in which a certain manner of behaviour is inappropriate and those kinds of situations actually provoke changes of one’s habits (Bourdieu, 1984). As Shaw and Riach’s (2011) study shows, there is the
potential value to apply the field theory to ethical consumption.

To summarise in Bourdieu’s framework of habitus, capital and field, human conduct is the outcome of a complex interaction of the three which causes social distinction. More specifically, Bourdieu’s theory of practices includes a discussion about the construction of social classes and status group, accommodating an issue of power relationships and social order. In particular habitus contains the characteristic of continuity so it is shaped by childhood experiences or family norms and it positions itself as the central ordering mechanism in one’s social life (Wright et al., 2001). This is in line with Bourdieu’s conceptual framework of taste which is another important indicator of class. Bourdieu extensively talks about taste in the context of art, home décor, photography, food, etc. that is closely linked to our daily lives. This will be further explained in the following section.

2.3.6 Taste

Bourdieu (1984) explains taste as a set of embodied preferences that hinge on cultural capital such as education or long-term familiarity with artistic and aesthetic objects (see Holt, 1998 for an overview). Possessing a particular taste for food is used to distinguish one from the others. For instance, in England, the working classes tend to associate with sweet milky tea and the professional classes prefer unsweetened Earl Grey or espresso (see Mintz, 1985). A person with a working class background would more likely purchase sweet, filling and fatty food because of lack of other alternatives and enjoyment of the sensation of feeling satiated (Wright et al., 2001). Even though the professional and the blue-collar workers may nowadays have equal economic capital, the blue-collar workers still stick to a taste for sweet food because one’s food taste is the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning and exists as the most durable nostalgia (Bourdieu, 1984).

Like the notion of habitus which is a naturalised system of distinction through everyday practices (Bourdieu, 1990), taste is seen as a resource for, and a means of, making social distinction through everyday practices (Arsel and Bean, 2013). In Bourdieu’s
(1984, p. 184) words, “tastes in food, culture and presentation are indicators of class because trends in their consumption seemingly correlate with an individual’s fit in society as they develop their own aesthetic criteria.” Taste can be reflected in every consumption practices and in the social interactions such as participating in particular activities or socialising with the peer group members. In Piacentini and Mailer’s (2004) empirical study about symbolic consumption in teenagers’ clothing choices, a particular preference in clothing and the ways of dressing are based on the participants’ tastes which are learned effortlessly and unconsciously through their social world. By pursuing a particular fashion style, the participants may build their own social space which differentiates oneself from the outsiders and assimilates oneself with the insiders. In this sense, taste serves as a system of classification that perpetuates symbolic hierarchies through embodied action (DiMaggio, 1987). Regarding this, Bourdieu (1984, p. 466) says, “taste is an acquired disposition to ‘differentiate’ and ‘appreciate’… to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction.”

2.3.7 Critiques of Bourdieu’s theory

Even though Bourdieu’s theory has been acclaimed to have played an important role in explaining social inequality, it is not without limitations. According to Jenkins (1992), perhaps the most crucial weakness of Bourdieu’s work is the inability to cope with subjectivity. In other words, Bourdieu fails to take into account the degree of freedom of choice for individuals (Jenkins, 1992; Slater, 1997). Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013, p. 1793) support this, addressing the emergence of the hybrid consumer who does not fit into any particular market segment defined in traditional marketing literature; for instance, “the hybrid consumer buys cheaper generics and low-end brands on some purchase occasions, and then on other occasions trades up to premium, high-end brands and happily pays for them.” In this vein, today’s consumers are hard to be categorised or defined based ‘solely’ on the resources they have because they do not consistently stick to their tastes.

2.3.8 Summary
Even though Bourdieu’s theory contains some limitations, there is no doubt that the business and management literature has benefitted from an engagement with Bourdieu’s contributions (Nord, 2005). In particular, Bourdieu’s conceptual frameworks such as different forms of capital, habitus, and the field can be applied to consumption studies because Bourdieu tends to focus on consumer preferences for products in daily lives such as clothing, home furnishings, entertainment, cultural activities, etc. (Allen and Anderson, 1994). The objects of consumer choices reflect a symbolic hierarchy which classifies social groups as Bourdieu (1984) shows different classes have different preferences in the realm of leisure activities and food.

What Bourdieu reminds us of is that consumption is not just about purchasing goods and services but it includes more complex dynamics. Understanding the concept of consumption should not be limited to the choices of objects in marketplaces but should be focused on the choices which show how consumers define and create themselves. The selection of particular goods and services can easily be imitated by others but which goods are chosen and the ways how the chosen goods are used, namely the performative aspects are hardly noticed and copied from others. In this sense, Bourdieu places a great emphasis on the performative aspects which actually play a role of making a distinction from others. Attending to Bourdieu, consumption is understood not just as a physical or material dimension of the object, accommodating economic capital but it becomes a nebulous process of socially created symbolic production which also contains cultural capital. This view is in line with the discussion of inconspicuous consumption made in section 2.2, arguing that people who have a certain level of tastes subtly make a distinction from others by noticing, understanding and sharing particular values and ethos in their consumption practices.

Finally, Bourdieu’s theory raises an issue of collectivity which is connected to the social role of consumption (see details in section 2.1). Bourdieu’s concepts such as habitus, forms of capital and taste emphasise the ‘born to be’ mechanism by which individuals have spontaneously or naturally adopted features. However, every individual interacts with others so an influence of others is hardly avoidable. Bourdieu’s theory implies the importance of understanding consumption at a group level which lies
in the socio-cultural context.

Bourdieu’s theory is applicable to the context of ethical consumption because ethical consumers make themselves distinct from others by conducting ethical consumption practices which accommodate a certain level of economic, social and cultural capital. Ethical consumers build their own social world (or group) and share their ethical ethos and values with the like-minded people (the group members). At the same time, they move in and out of the social world (group) negotiating their ethical identities and tastes. Here, an idea of pursuing a particular taste is not limited to the choices of certain materials but it includes a particular way of living. Bourdieu tends to focus on the phenomenon in everyday practices so “habit suggests a style or a manner of living that reflects the sense of capacity to carry out particular kinds of actions in particular settings but not others” (Swartz, 2002, p. 67). Along with this, the sociological understanding of style which is associated with the way of living will be further discussed in the following section.
2.4 Style

2.4.1 Introduction

In the section 2.3 a discussion of Bourdieu’s theory helps to explain how consumers define and present themselves through consumption practices which show the socio-cultural aspect of consumption. Slater (1997, p. 131) claims that, “consumption is a meaningful activity” that puts emphasis on understanding the meanings and values of consumption. In line with this, consumption is a self-creation project which brings about the formation of self-identity.

McCracken (1986, p. 71) points out that consumption symbolism is always in transition because it is “constantly flowing to and from its several locations in the social world, aided by the collective and individual efforts of designers, producers, advertisers and consumers.” People keep changing their own identities by creating or producing new identities rather than having or holding fixed identities. Moreover, most people have multiple identities (Settles, 2004). For instance, I have the identities of daughter, student, tutor, and friend, etc. and all these identities can be changeable and co-exist. Based on the identity that I hold in a certain situation I may have different consumption behaviours. For instance, I may choose or reject particular goods based on the situation. Then consumption is ultimately a process of negotiation and endless interpretations (Baudrillard, 1988; Elliott, 1997). In this vein, the role of consumption in the self-creation processes is temporal and contextual rather than absolute, static and fixed.

However, consumption is not just about the choice of particular items but also about the ways how the goods are used. For instance, an individual may use goods and services in a certain way in some situations but when facing the similar situation again and again, his/her use of them may change into other forms. As an individual is a social self (see details in section 2.1) interacting with others through the consumption practices, he/she reveals differences in their consumption behaviours. In this vein, individuals’ performative aspects should not be ignored in terms of understanding the self-creation project. This is not limited to the consumption practices but it includes the phenomenon
in everyday practices which show the way of one’s living (Bourdieu, 1990). This is associated with the sociological meaning of style and this will be further discussed in this section.

2.4.2 The concept of style

The concept of style has generally been employed in the area of aesthetic or fashion (e.g. Elsa Klench’s famous fashion program ‘style’ on CNN). In particular, style and fashion are interchangeably used even though these words are not synonymous. Fashion designer, Oscar de la Renta explains the difference between style and fashion with reference to clothing; style is any distinctive mode of tailoring, while fashion is the style prevailing at any given time (Heilpern, 2009). Thus fashion is the presentation of what is trendy right now but style reflects the people’s way of life that is unique to everyone. Style is something that has been modified and customised at an individual level to suit each person’s own personality and body. Moreover, fashion is often used in relation to clothing or accessories that fall into the fashion industry but style is associated with anything that makes a unique way of speaking and carrying oneself. This is in line with Bourdieu’s (1984) taste which is a means of developing a sense of who one is and making social distinction.

As Goodman (1975, p. 799) begins his essay of The Status of Style with the observation that “obviously, subject is what is said, style is how”, the notion of style is not just about a description of aesthetic or artistic designs but more about the matter of how things are done and how human activities are characteristically undertaken. Meyer (1987, p. 21) proposes a definition of style that, “it is a replication of patterning, whether in human behaviour or in the artefacts produced by human behaviour, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints.” In this vein the notion of style is useful to understand how an individual presents the self namely, a self-creation project through consumption. In other words style deals not only with the description of one’s appearances but also with the total formation of the self, including one’s performative aspects in daily lives. Cohen (1965) also explains that the ultimate formation of the self includes the elements such as the kinds of clothes one wears, one’s
posture, one’s gait, one’s likes and dislikes, what one talks about and the opinion one expresses. Early debate around the idea of style was limited to the articulations of symbolic capital and the basis of strategies for resistance enacted through the conspicuous consumption of style-inscribed or aesthetic commodities (Brownlie et al., 2007). However, style can be used and applied to various disciplines or areas that go beyond the field of fashion and aesthetic commodities.

Another important aspect to be dealt with is that a discussion of style is relatively based rather on the individuals and overlooks the social or collective aspect. As the notion of style has extensively dealt with fashion, self-fashioning practices which construct an individual’s particular style has been covered in relation to the nature of consumers’ emotional involvement (Rafferty, 2011). For instance, consumers have the desire for uniqueness which drives consumption (Roux and Korchia, 2006) or they have an ‘irrational desire’ (Elliott, 1997): they sometimes have the feeling of arousal and passion from consuming certain objects (Redden and Steiner, 2000), the feeling of self-esteem (Banister and Hogg, 2004) or even confidence (Roux and Korchia, 2006). Arguably, as shopping is generally considered to be a very personal activity in one’s daily lives, the nature of emotion which is involved in consumption practices is often considered personal, as well. However, these kinds of emotions are not solely created by the individual who constructs one’s personal style through consumption practices but also by the reactions of others to it (see for examples Englis and Solomon, 1997; Park and Burns, 2005; Roux and Korchia, 2006). Consumers tend to respond to others’ reactions that are caused by experiences of an appearance transformation. McRobbie’s (2005) research on a British television makeover show also depicts the importance of making ‘correct choices’ to get involved in a set of reference group. Likewise, in order to understand the complex dynamics of emotion such as where those emotions stem from, why they have emerged, how they are linked to construct one’s own style and how they work to stimulate particular consumption practices, the social nature of emotion should not be ignored. Emotion within social relations clearly plays a vital role in the fashion consumption process (see McRobbie, 2005, 2008). As the sense of emotional value also can make an influence on the practices of stylisation, the notion of style should not be anchored solely in the individual context but it also has to be
embedded in a group context.

2.4.3 The social meanings of style

Any human activity can be understood with the notion of style (Jacquette, 2000). Within consumer behaviour research, style also has diffused into everyday marketplace discourses. The constitution of a style is not limited to the area of fashion (e.g. Murray, 2002) which is a narrower understanding of style such as the assemblage of clothing and adornment objects. Style includes ‘lifestyles’ (Maffesoli, 1996) which are a rather broad ‘way of doing things’ such as the general selection and combination of objects. Kjeldgaard (2009, p. 80) argues that, “styles can be judged as legitimate on a purely aesthetic basis (Fatima’s liking of the ‘pop’ style) but style is also laden with social meanings that emerge through the appropriation of a style by other groups and through institutionalised meanings generated through market representations” (as is also noted by Holt, 1997). This is because style, like many other philosophically interesting concepts, is systematically ambiguous because it is involved in different meanings in different contexts (Jacquette, 2000). For instance, art objects are characterised or understood by a high degree of autonomy. Some may consider a piece of art novel and valuable but some may not share the same thoughts. In this way, the attribution of style is the social function.

Historically, Weber (1978) asserts the social role of style, arguing that hierarchical social strata are expressed and reproduced through ‘styles of life’ that vary in their honorific value. Kjeldgaard’s (2009) empirical study proves this dynamic that one of the informants likes the style of pop-girls but she avoids having this style in order not to look like twelve or thirteen-year olds. It implies that choice of style reflects not only, even passively, a given, individual preference but it also reflects certain relations of styles and peer evaluations of which style is thought to be acceptable. Thus, style includes social meanings that can accommodate the discrepancy between the attitude towards a certain style and the actual adoption of a particular style. Seen from this perspective, style implies the significance of understanding how material goods and sociality interact in understanding the cultures of consuming materials produced
through such interactions (Brownlie et al., 2007).

2.4.4 Style in subcultural studies

Within consumer behaviour research, style has often been analysed in subcultural settings because it clearly shows the way that individual consumers are related to the group dynamics of consumption by producing their own particular social and consumption practices (Elliott and Davies, 2006; Kjeldgaard, 2009). One of the most influential studies on this tradition seems to be Hebdige’s (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. The book shows, by investigating the studies of the youth subculture of post-war UK such as punk, mods and skinheads, that each subculture establishes a style; the styles and their meanings differentiate the groups from each other (Clarke, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). Hebdige (1979) defines style in four different ways; first, style is a communicative intent which plays a role as an expression. In other words style functions as a communicative tool in the way that people signal to others and they also read the signals. Even in the aesthetic literature, style is not just about signifying or symbolic features but also about a certain way of interpreting them (Goodman, 1975). This is in the same vein as Biernacki (2000) who argues that cultural signs cannot be understood in isolation from culture practices.

Connected to this, Hebdige’s (1979) second definition of style is a bricolage which is about how certain objects and commodities attain new meanings by being combined and juxtaposed with other. Clarke (1976, cited by Hebdige, 1997, p. 136) further explains the subcultural bricolage, saying:

“Together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and, within any one culture, such signs are assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of discourse. However, when the bricolage re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall repertoire of signs, or when that object is placed within a different total ensemble, a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed.”
In this way, a certain group of people adopts and combines different ranges of commodities, and transforms or subverts the original meanings of them. Kjeldgaard (2009, p. 72) explains this as “the appropriation, innovative re-combination and ultimately perversion of readily available signs and material culture.”

Third, style is homology which is the combination of certain ways of doing something and an ideological set of values. The term ‘homology’ which was firstly applied to the subculture study of hippies and biker boys by Willis (1978) is understood as the central values held among the members of the subculture. For instance, the punks adopt “the trashy cut-up clothes, spiky hair, the pogo and amphetamines, the spitting, the vomiting, the format of fanzines, the insurrectionary poses and the ‘soulless’, frantically driven music” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 114). As for the punks, the symbolic objects - dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music - form a unity which binds the members together.

Finally, style is a signifying practice. Lefebvre (1971) claims that we are surrounded by emptiness but it is an emptiness filled with signs. An adoption of a particular style such as having a particular type of symbolic objects or presenting a particular way of using them delivers certain meanings or messages. Clarke et al. (1993, p. 54) also assert that, “despite visibility, things simply appropriated and worn (or listened to) do not make a style. What makes a style is the activity of stylisation - the active organisation of objects with activities and outlook which produce an organised group identity in the form and shape of a coherent and distinctive way of ‘being in the world’.” In this way, style has communicative potential through the basic semiotic processes of selection and combination (Barthes, 1957; Hebdige, 1979).

2.4.5 Style and authenticity

Studies concentrating on style within the subcultural context (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Kates, 2002; Elliott and Davies, 2006) have considered authenticity as an interesting concept. Elliott and Davies (2006) argue that an authentic style is natural, obvious and ordinary for the members but it is also implicit and should
go unnoticed by others. They say, “in-authenticity of group membership is defined by failing to truly appreciate the culture, history, rituals and traditions of the community by making errors in performance” (Elliott and Davies, 2006, p. 156). The key aspect of authenticity is not about having the ‘right stuff’ but about knowing how the right stuff is achieved (i.e. performance). What it implies is that authenticity brings an idea of making a distinction from others by holding a particular value in a right way which is the site for identity. A display of material resources is normally used as props to signify one’s membership and style. However, the choice of particular material goods cannot fully and accurately explain one’s style because it is not that simplistic. For instance, in Elliott and Davies’s (2006) ethnographic and co-operative inquiry study of the symbolic brand communities, an act of shopping in particular stores which are hidden away is an expression and recognition of social collectivity. By shopping in the stores which are hard to find, the participants in this study make a distinction from others who go shopping on the high street. In other words, their choice of items, brands or fashion styles is also unique so that it can hardly be noticed in the mainstream. Therefore, both ‘shops’ and ‘shopping’ are used as markers of their own cultural boundaries. The authentic style of this particular group is formed not only by an assemblage of material resources, but also by the actions and behaviours that communicate style identity and membership (Elliott and Davies, 2006).

In line with this, Entwistle (2000) asserts that style is comprised of a combination of dress and the way in which it is worn, where the body has become the site for identity. In other words, an emphasis is on the body as a crucial part of the performance of identity. Willis (1975) offers a description of the authentic motorbike riders who not only wear tough leather clothes, but also display a body posture of ‘toughness’. In this way, an authentic style is not just what clothes to wear but is more about ‘naturalness’ in all aspects. This perspective is associated with the role of distinction which basically marks the difference from others. At the same time, subcultural choices speak symbolically to the members of the group that show a degree of commitment to the subculture, namely signifying membership (Cohen, 1965). From this, style plays a role as a tool of social interaction and social structure which construct ‘webs of connectivity’. Elliott and Davies (2006) extend this into the concept of legitimacy
which differentiates between ‘true’ members and more ‘marginal’ members who may follow the accepted style but for the wrong reasons. The marginal members are considered to be ‘pretenders’ in the subcultural context because they are considered to be inauthentic members because, despite their great interest in the subculture, they only ‘delve superficially’ into the ethos of the group (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Group members try to learn to perform the style, especially novice members tend to seek to become true or style authentic (Elliott and Davies, 2006). Kates’s (2002, p. 389) study about subcultural consumption of gay consumers finds that “learning Gaydar may begin with active efforts to scan the gay neighbourhood for cues as to the correct way to consume, obtaining an important secondary socialisation into local styles and meaning.”

The authentic style of a subcultural group is shared, negotiated and sometimes re-constructed by members: it is not a fixed entity and it is constantly formed and re-formed (Elliott and Davies, 2006). According to Ewen (1999, p. 23), “Style is a visible reference point by which we have come to understand life in progress.” Mitchell (1983) and Ouellet (1994) also demonstrate that each social world has a style, but despite the appearances, neither style is ready-made. In other words, it is never fixed and it is always moving and always becoming (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987). This is in line with an idea of identity that an individual self exists as the same entity but an individual’s identities are fluid and changeable (Abercrombie et al., 2000). In this sense, style demonstrates the role of authenticity of performance that ultimately elaborates the construction of identity at the social level through a dynamic process of always becoming.

Style has been understood based on a societal formation which combines two dichotomous principles: adaption and distinction. The theoretical legacy of the subcultural approach has led to how style consumption emerges as a creative process of bricolage and distinction within and between subcultures and differentiation from mainstream marketplace orders (e.g. Goulding et al., 2002; Elliott and Davies, 2005; Ostberg, 2007). Historically, the notion of subculture has been studied within the framework of class and power which includes the aspect of disregard or attack.
dominant values (Goulding et al., 2002). For instance, the skinhead subculture which is typified as a culture of the combination of shaved heads, rolled jeans and industrial boots is often understood to be radical in terms of its attire (Enrich, 1993). As the well-known subcultures such as the Teddy boys, Punk Rockers and Hippies show, subcultures have traditionally been connected to the notion of social resistance and reaction against dominant culture. However, Elliott and Davies (2006) argue that rather than focusing only on the aspect of resisting against dominant orders, subcultural activity including the relevant style is important for the construction and expression of identity. Following on with the skinhead example, Brake (1985, p. 75-76) interprets the skinhead subculture in a completely different way, arguing:

“It actually reflects traditional values which are highly conservative in nature. Their racist attitudes and beliefs fit well with Britain’s discriminatory immigration policy and politics. Some of the values in the skinhead subculture include: hard work, patriotism, defence of local territory, and attacks on minority groups such as hippies, gays, and members of ethnic communities.”

As the description shows, the same subculture can be interpreted in various ways. In this vein, subcultures are not limited to a framework of social resistance but they are becoming sites of creativity and self-expression (Elliott and Davies, 2006). A further exploration of the concept of style in relation to the role of expression will be achieved in the following section 2.4.6.

2.4.6 Brake’s analysis of style

Brownlie et al. (2007, p. 117) argue that, “style is not just the spectacle that cements and animates the group but it plays a role as the prior acts of modification and the codes which regulate and place value upon particular forms and styles of modification.” As Hewer et al.’s (2008) study of Scottish car cruisers shows, the modified ‘look’ of the car is the cultural object and the collective display of the taste and style that mark out the territory of the car cruiser. In this way, style plays a significant role of expressing identities.
In relation to this, Brake (1985) offers a definition of style. It consists of three main elements: Image which is about the appearance composed of costume, accessories such as hairstyle, jewellery and artefacts, Demeanour which is made up of expression, gait and posture, and Argot which is special vocabulary to be used and includes how it is delivered. What Brake (1985) puts emphasis on is that style can be accomplished by the mixture of these three elements. In other words, each single element cannot fully and accurately explain the notion of style. For instance, image itself can cause a misunderstanding when defining a certain style. When a man puts a thimble on his thumb, he can be considered as a tailor or a person who works in a fashion industry. However, judges also wear thimbles when they read papers. A thimble is a useful item to turn the pages of documents so the government in Korea offers thimbles to judges. In this vein, image is not the only factor which identifies and explains style but it has to come with demeanour and argot. Brownlie et al.’s (2007, p. 121) study of the subculture and style of car cruisers further explains the development of a unique argot: “cruisers would use a lexicon of terms to not only endorse their own individual membership but also exclude non-members or outsiders. The language of ‘Scooby’, ‘Evo’, ‘Cossie’, ‘Chinq’, ‘Feestie’, ‘Fourteens’, ‘Convoy’ and ‘Cruises’ may appear incomprehensible to non-members but they appear to serve a unique function of mapping out the shared identity of the tribe.” Understanding and exchanging a particular type of language is an important factor which constitutes style as it occurs in a particular context. Keesing (1981, p. 88) claims that, “the style of speech depends not only on the speaker’s status but also on that of the person spoken to, and the relationship between them and the situation.” Finally, regarding the aspect of demeanour, a particular way to pose, move and walk plays an important role which completes one’s style in harmony with the chosen items. Willis (1975) also describes the motorbike riders, stating they not only focus on what they wear but also consider displaying a particular body posture.

Brake’s (1985) analysis of style is particularly accounted in this thesis because it not only includes a description of the symbolic materials which are associated with display but also includes the ways in which they are used, i.e. the performances of the users (see Entwistle, 2000; Elliott and Davies, 2006). Ostberg (2007) supports that the key to
stylishness lies not in objectification of just buying and having the right stuff, but in embodying the consumption of goods in precisely the right manner. Mitchell’s (1983) ethnography of mountain climbers also proves that in order to understand the whole of mountaineer identity, a discussion of style should be employed. Kidder (2005, p. 347) analyses Mitchell’s study, arguing that, “in an age of planes, helicopters, and various automated gadgets, making it to the peaks of mountains in itself is not impressive; what climbers care about is how a person makes it to the peak.” In this sense, Brake’s framework of style seems useful in exploring the role of expression - both display and performance - through the consumption-related acts within a particular context.

2.4.7 Summary

This section 2.4 discussed that consumption operates within a socio-cultural realm and has a role as a signalling device and a maker of boundaries. In other words consumption not only signifies an individual’s identity; the sense of self, of personhood, and of what kind of person one is (Abercrombie et al., 2003) but also allows consumers to interact and communicate with others (Veblen, 1899; Berger and Heath, 2007; Ellis et al., 2011). The process of self-creation is associated with one’s way of life. The notion of style is generally used and employed in the field of fashion as a descriptive term of one’s appearance (Brownlie et al., 2007). However, this thesis understands style from a broader perspective. Style is not just about a description of aesthetic designs or appearances but it is more about the ultimate formation of the self (Cohen, 1965). This includes not only the selection of goods which show one’s taste but also how they are used which is in line with the performative aspect.

In terms of developing and presenting a sense of the self, style plays a role of signifying a particular set of values. In other words style is an expressive tool which allows people to interact with others or makes people distinct from others. This is in line with the activity of stylisation which produces an organised group identity through a coherent and distinctive way (Clarke et al., 1993).

The social meaning of style could be useful if it is applied to the field of ethical
consumption because ethical consumption is also considered to be the activity of stylisation in terms of presenting ethical meanings, values and identities and sharing them with the like-minded people. Through this process, ethical consumers develop a certain set of cultural boundaries and the group membership. This is associated with what Hebdige (1979) explains style in subcultural context (see details in section 2.4.4). Consumers who pursue ethical values reflect and present their own ways of life through the form of style which can exist as a distinctive set of social world. It sounds similar to Brake’s (1985 p. 8) definition of the notion of subculture: “subcultures are meaning systems, modes of expression or lifestyles developed by groups in subordinate structural positions in response to dominant meaning systems.” However, as Enrich (1993) argues, classifying a particular group of people as a certain subculture based on the above-mentioned definition is too simplistic because it can bring inaccurate preconceptions to individuals who may fit a particular subcultural mould. Existing as a distinctive set of social world which is different from the prevailing set of norms or values does not necessarily mean that it has great differences from the dominant culture. Arguably, the only difference lies in the way the people pursue and present a certain value or ideology. Enrich (1993, p. 31) also claims that, “people can be classified quite easily according to the Brake’s definition but very often, the only thing that the members of a group have in common and the only differentiating factor between the group and the rest of society is an identification to a semantic code.”

In this vein, this thesis does not classify ethical consumption as a subculture. Ethical consumption includes some characteristics of subculture such as expressing particular values and ethos and building a group membership, but it does not mean that ethical consumption is involved in or equals to subculture. This thesis considers ethical consumption as one way of displaying and performing a particular value that is associated with the notion of style.
2.5 Subculture of consumption

2.5.1 Introduction

In the previous section it is argued that consumption is central to the meaningful practice of our everyday life as all voluntary consumption seems to carry, either consciously or unconsciously, symbolic meanings (Wattanasuwan, 2005). For instance, Ewen (1999) discusses two photographs of the same woman in his book *All Consuming Images*; the first presents an image of an upper-class woman dressed in Parisian *haute couture* and the second one is of a brooding Semitic woman dressed in a Palestinian scarf and desert kaftan. Featherstone (2007) argues that based on the selected items, the way in which they are used and the appropriate conduct and demeanour on the part of the wearer/user, there is the visible classification of the social world between the two women even though they are the same. This is in line with the role of ‘symbols of class status’ (Goffman, 1951) in consumption that requires an appropriate and acceptable behaviour in each context and situation.

Douglas and Isherwood (1980) similarly argue that the choice of particular goods and the ways in which they are used draw the line of social relationships. People share the names of goods with others and they also know how to use and consume them appropriately. For instance, a group of wine connoisseurs would like to have dinner together in order to talk about wines and to taste the wines most appropriate to their dishes. They may also put emphasis on the drinking etiquette. Through consumption activities, consumers construct their own categories and form relationships with other people who hold common consumption values and behaviours (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). These kinds of features exist as a ‘whole way of life’ in this community that is what we call ‘culture’; a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour (Williams, 1965). In terms of considering a ‘way of doing things’ (Maffesoli, 1996), this seems similar to the idea of style which was covered in the previous section. Style is closer to a tool of sign which presents and expresses a semiotic value of all aspects of culture (Hebdige, 1979). For instance, a particular
culture with an ethos of machismo and strength can be presented in various ways such as Klien’s (1986) description about the bodybuilding subculture and Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) analysis of the Harley Davidson subculture. The notion of culture is not limited to the expressive role of particular values but it is more complex and multiple.

This section explores the nature of shared cultural meanings which constitute a particular culture (Kates, 2002). Within the context of consumer culture, consumers express who they are through particular consumption practices and share particular values and ethos with others (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). It looks at how certain meanings and values of a particular consumer culture are constructed and presented through consumption practices. In particular, the concept of subculture will be investigated because subculture is considered to be a distinctive set of social world which clearly shows the characteristics of the culture and the people who are involved in (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

2.5.2 The notion of subculture

Subculture is understood as a certain cultural feature that is distinguished from other groups and the wider society from which it has emerged (Muggleton, 2007). Transnational anthropologist Hannerz (1992, p. 69) asserts that the term ‘sub’ introduces a range of ambiguities: “is a subculture simply a segment of a larger culture, or is it something subordinate to a dominant culture, or is it something subterranean and rebellious, or is it substandard, qualitatively inferior?”

In consumer research, “subculture is a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity. Other characteristics of subcultures of consumption include an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression - which is associated with style” (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995, p. 43). In consumption markets and culture, “historically, subcultures have provided creative spaces for those
who dare to be different or refuse to conform to conventional norms. They are also vehicles for self-expression and sometimes act as platforms for what may be considered deviant behaviour” (Goulding and Saren, 2009, p. 28). Consumer researchers focus more on the expressive role of subculture that accommodates the idea of identity construction and group membership. Past subcultural studies in the area of consumer research are as follows; the punks (Hebdige, 1979), gays (Kates, 2002), lesbians (Weston, 1993), fundamentalist Christians (O’Guinn and Belk, 1989), Harley Davidson enthusiasts (Schouten and McAlenxander, 1995), Star Trek fans (Kozinets, 2001), and mountain men (Belk and Costa, 1998). These studies demonstrate that subculture in the context of consumption presents and symbolises a particular set of values shared by those who are interested in them.

2.5.3 Four features of subculture

Among various interpretations of the concept of subculture, there are four features of subculture which are particularly emphasised in the field of consumer research. They are as follows;

2.5.3.1 The relationship between the subcultural group and the society

First of all, the relationship between the subcultural group and the society (or the dominant culture) is of great importance. In particular, it tends to be conceptualised as ‘contra-cultures’ or more often ‘countercultures’ which are predicated on some forms of disorder, delinquency, or deviance (Muggleton, 2007). Abercrombie et al. (2000) also argue in the dictionary of sociology that the term can be used for any social group but it is applied most commonly to deviant or youth cultures that possess a culture opposed to the dominant culture of the larger whole; e.g. punks, skinheads, or mods, etc. This is because subcultural groups construct and express their identity that builds their own social world by displaying and performing aesthetic or cultural practices. And their own social world plays a role as social resistance and reaction against dominant culture. Along with this, most of the subculture studies identify social class and particularly the powerlessness of the working class as the main catalyst for the developments of these
subcultures (Goulding et al., 2002). Once this characteristic of subcultures integrates with consumption, this is along with the notion of consumer resistance and political nuances in terms of refusing or resisting the dominant norms. The notion of consumer resistance has been widely employed and conceptualised within the tradition of consumer research (Penaloza and Price, 1993; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Fourier, 1998; Fischer, 2001; Holt, 2002; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010) (see also section 2.1.5.1). This is because consumer actions such as a purchase or the withholding of a purchase clearly reveal the meanings and intentions which play a role as a part of the process of politicalisation.

There are multiple forms of consumer resistance engaged in various communities such as Community-Supported Agriculture (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007) or specific brands such as Starbucks (Thompson and Arsel, 2004). In particular, Penaloza and Price (1993) attempted to explain consumer resistance by putting ‘individual action’ and ‘collective action’ on the vertical axis, and ‘reformist goals’ and ‘radical goals’ on the horizontal axis. They consider the individual reformist as the consumer who resists through everyday activities such as cooking homemade food or co-creative activities that ignore the market’s instructions of product use (Campbell, 2005; Ulver-Sneistrup et al., 2012). For instance, consumers do not always follow the original recipe of products but they create their own dish by adding some other ingredients or changing the way of cooking. There are consumer boycotts with visible actions such as demonstrations that can fall into the collective radicals. The individuals who participate in these kinds of events are considered the individual radicals. Ethical Consumer Research Association Ltd. (2013) offers a list of ethical consumer progressive boycotts, for instance, the boycott for Adidas is called Viva, emphasising the problems of using kangaroo skin to make some types of football boots. Simon (2011, p. 163) describes consumer protests, saying that, “consumption and consumer protests surely have power - power to make large and influential entities like Starbucks and Walmart act in ways they don’t necessarily want to act (even if they are happy to take credit for their actions).” The collective reformists are characterised to be less radical so they focus on gentle or even subtle types of activities to show their positions. For instance, they may gather and visit second-hand shops in order to experience a type of ethical consumption.
and to reduce buying new products in marketplaces.

Izberk-Bilgin (2010) recently offers an interdisciplinary review of consumer resistance, distinguishing two distinct paradigms: one critical of consumer culture which emphasises ‘macro-strategies’: how the dominant classes and culture industries execute power over workers and consumers. Another one which is more positive to consumer culture emphasises ‘everyday micro-tactics’: how consumers in quiet but skilful ways use consumption to oppose the dominant order. The first one may go along with the radical forms which are considered to be the traditional way of showing consumer resistance. The second one may fall into the reformist forms which are considered to be relatively creative and quiet. As discussed in section 2.5.3.1, previous subculture studies focus extensively on the radical forms of consumer resistance but the quiet and subtle aspects are seemingly ignored. The potentiality of mundane consumption to mobilise political and consumer resistance is well worth dealing with (Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010). For instance Dobscha and Ozanne’s (2001, p. 205) analysis of the female members of an environmental action group finds that cynical consumers (participants of this study) “seek to live outside the marketplace and reluctantly enter the marketplace only when other non-market options are exhausted.” They show this kind of consumerist ideology through their own practices such as making toys out of soda cans or refraining from many convenience products. 

Connected to this, Ulver-Sneistrup et al. (2012) also emphasise the importance of a quiet kind of activism which can be found in daily lives.

**2.5.3.2 Subculture and the construction and expression of identity**

Subcultural spaces increasingly are becoming sites of creativity and self-expression for both male and female participants from all social backgrounds (Elliott and Davies, 2006). Like brand communities, consumption-oriented (sub) cultures compose specialised, non-geographically bound and socially constructed communities based on a set of cultural values which are shared by admirers of them (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Then, it is significant to understand the construction and expression of identity each subcultural activity has because it is unique to each subculture.
For example, Goulding and Saren (2009) look at the nature of gender identities within the gothic subculture; a subculture firmly rooted in objects of consumption and bonded together by a common fascination with the iconic figure of the vampire. Ostberg (2007) investigates ‘the Stockholm Brat enclave’, an exclusive group of young, affluent and trendy consumers, emphasising style as the key term to describe social logic of the cultural organisations. Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p. 54) show the style of machismo, describing it as “Harleys are reputedly the biggest, heaviest, loudest (albeit not the fastest), and, therefore, manliest motorcycles on the road. In some ways, these properties of the motorcycle mirror properties displayed by the bikers themselves; massive bellies (or biceps) and loud, aggressive behaviour seem more natural on a Harley than on any other type of motorcycle.”

The examples demonstrate that subculture is a unique and distinctive way of presenting a particular culture, value and identity. In particular, consumption activities play a significant role to disclose identity salient within subcultures (e.g. Donnelly and Young, 1988; Celsi et al., 1993; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Therefore, the subcultural framework can be applied and used in the field of communities or organisations which consumers view their identities as somehow apart from mainstream others and reflexively understand symbolic boundaries or strive to achieve individual distinction relative to others who share the subculture (Kates, 2002).

### 2.5.3.3 Hierarchical structure of subculture

Third, subcultural groups include the hierarchical social structures based on the level of commitment to the group activities. The processes of subculture formation by and large work within complex webs of social relations (Brownlie et al., 2007). The aspect of constructing, negotiating and sharing a particular value or ethos among group members is the fundamental part of subculture. Regarding shared rituals and modes of symbolic expression, it seems extremely similar to those which mark neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 98): “without the rigidity of the forms of organisation with which we are familiar, it refers to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form.” The notion of tribus (tribes) is extensively
used as a means of explanation for any numbers of social groupings. However, Brownlie et al. (2007) assert that there are fundamental differences between neo-tribes and subcultures, for instance, the existence of hierarchical social structures within a subculture. In other words, there are different layers of structures within a subcultural group based on the commitment to the ideology of the group (Fox, 1987; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Brownlie et al., 2007).

Connected to this, Fox (1987, p. 48) defines three levels of involvement as follows; the first layer is hard core members who exhibit a “commitment and ideology that is full time and enduring”. This group acts as opinion leaders. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995, p. 23) alter the term ‘hard core’ to ‘Fans’, describing that, “active participants within fandom as a social, cultural and interpretive institution.” The second layer is formed of soft core members who demonstrate less commitment and willingness to submit to the ritualised practices of the group, especially where discomfort or hardship is involved (Fox, 1987). In turn, their role is subordinate to and dictated by the hard core. The third layer is pretenders or followers who show great interest in the subculture but only ‘delve superficially’ into the ethos serving as an audience and material support to the hard core and soft core members (Fox, 1987). As individuals become more embedded in a collective or a group, an individual becomes an exemplar of the group (Turner and Oakes, 1986). Based on the level of commitment or involvement to the group, individuals who increase involvement, knowledge, and possessions related to the group identity take the subcultural activity as the dominant part of their lifestyle and in turn, individuals who are less involved in the group activities, having less social connections with other members consider the subcultural activity as a minor part of their lifestyle.

Maffesoli (1996, p. 76) claims that, “for neo-tribes, it is less a question of belonging to a gang, a family or a community than of switching from one group to another.” In other words, the concept of neo-tribes focuses on the fact of having a particular group membership rather than considering the level of involvement within a group. This is because neo-tribes are distinctive in ephemerality, compared with subcultures in which membership is seen to be fairly static and permeates everyday activities (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Maffesoli, 1996; Miklas and Arnold, 1999). What it implies is that
subculture puts emphasis on the group membership which explains how individuals get into the group culture, negotiating and associating with one’s identity.

2.5.3.4 Subculture and group membership

Following the social structure in subcultural groupings, finally, there is the nature of one’s assimilation to the subcultural group, namely, what Lemert (1951) calls ‘subculturalisation’. In other words, membership which is to become a member of a subcultural group is framed through experiencing, learning and negotiating identity construction as a process and appreciating the dynamics and tensions of self as ‘becoming-being’ (Hardt, 1993). More specifically, this dynamic process of becoming is articulated through the objects, activities and consumption patterns (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In other words, a subculture typically encounters with certain products or activities which include cultural meanings that ultimately become articulated as unique, homologous styles or ideologies of consumption (Hebdige, 1979; Kinsey, 1982; Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1985). For these objectification and embodiment of subculture, a particular importance lies in the accommodation of a particular ‘taste’ in which Bourdieu (1984) emphasises the maintenance of exclusivity (see details in section 2.3). Connected to this, Thornton (1996/1997) introduces the concept of subcultural capital which shows the mechanisms that the members of the community hold the cultural codes to maintain one’s membership. Ostberg (2007) re-illuminates subcultural capital, arguing that it is transformed into practice and both objectified, as in owning the right consumption objects, and embodied, as in expressing a certain style for example, subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and carefully assembled record collections in the club cultures. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the beholder needs to possess some degree of subcultural knowledge so that he or she can decipher the relevant codes (Ostberg, 2007). Subcultural capital is not only about an expressive tool of distinctive values or beliefs but also about a set of symbolic cues which constructs the membership of a certain group and distinguishes such a group from others.

In terms of making a distinction from others by holding a group membership, debates
about authenticity should not be treated lightly in consumption of particular subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Belk and Costa, 1998; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Kozinets, 2001, 2002a; Brown et al., 2003; Leigh et al., 2006). As the concept of authenticity was previously discussed in section 2.4.5, while all members of a subculture tend to share the same core values, authentic and inauthentic members tend to be drawn to different elements of those core values and also enact those values differently (Fox, 1987; Kates, 2002; Quester et al., 2006).

The debate about authenticity is not limited within the subcultural groups but it is also connected to the relationship between the subcultural group and the public. Nowadays, it is easy to see subcultures in our daily lives, for instance, the skinhead look now has come into vogue and been commercialised by popular entertainers. Then the skinhead look has lost the real significance of the predominant defining feature of the youth subculture but it can just exist as a fashion fad. In other words, as subcultural consumption becomes established in the mainstream society, it becomes popular and can lose its distinctiveness. Of course, the authentic or the real value which each subculture pursues cannot easily be imitated or achieved by others. However, it is clear that some of the subcultural features can easily be adopted by the public these days even though people are not involved in those subcultures. Kates (2002) also argues that although some goods are used to signify gayness such as freedom rings, key chains and so on, they are widely used in a commercial way so they cannot specify the specific intensity, quality, or oppositional nature of subcultural meanings. Therefore, in order to understand subcultures, it is important to focus not only on the symbolic values or meanings of particular goods used by subcultural members, but also on how the goods are used with a particular reference to the aspect of subtle and diverse consumption practices even with ordinary goods. Kates’s (2002) study about gay consumers clearly shows the importance of the social meanings of small and subtle details; gay identity can actually be discerned by the fastidious care for the little things such as neatly coiffed hair, perfectly fitting or tight jeans, matching ironed shirts, eye contact, comportment, speech and other personal habits. These kinds of less focused features actually play a significant role of distinguishing between the authentic and inauthentic group member.
To summarise, a subculture of consumption can be understood as an expression of set of shared beliefs and values through acts of consumption within a distinctive subgroup of society. Subcultures are often considered to be contra-cultures as they are different or even opposed to the dominant cultures. In this sense, subcultural studies accommodate the issue of resistance and reformation. However, the aspect of differentiating from the dominant culture does not always imply an oppositional meaning but it can be seen as an expression of a certain identity. People experience, learn and negotiate the processes of identity construction that is called subculturalisation, and become a part of a subcultural group. As individuals’ identities are not fixed entities but they keep changing by interacting with others (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987; Abercrombie et al., 2000), subculturalisation is never achieved and it is an ongoing process. Based on the level of involvement to the group activities, the social hierarchical structures can be constructed within the group, and the issue of authenticity and membership is of great importance.

As the nature of consumption-oriented subcultures is conceptualised along with the symbolic expression of certain beliefs and values through consumption practices, it is easily assumed that only the material objects play a role of medium to present them. However, Belk et al. (1989) argue that subcultures are permeated into both the material objects of consumption and the entire subcultural lifestyle. This is in line with what the sociological meaning of style puts emphasis on; both display and performance (see details in section 2.4.6). Then subcultural lifestyles are related to specific events, products, times and even places where everything about the lifestyle happens. In particular, a discussion of places (see Chalmers and Arthur, 2008) is well worth focusing on because it plays a role of making a kind of subcultural boundary both tangibly and intangibly. A more in-depth investigation into places and their link to subcultures will be made in the following section.

2.5.4 Subcultural boundary: space and place

Ostberg (2007) asserts that prior research on community and consumption focus relatively on one brand, product or activity despite the fact that it is important to look at
more complex patterns in communities. In particular, we need to recognise that a community constantly negotiates and re-negotiates with its surroundings about the boundaries of the community (Ostberg, 2007). Featherstone (2007) emphasises that the space of organisations or communities is a manifestation of particular cultural codes, for instance, cities like Florence or Venice are full of the art treasures and cultural heritage of the past, or cities like Rio de Janeiro or San Francisco are composed of the outstanding natural beauty that is regarded as a cultural marker. This is not limited to consumption sites (places) in their physical dimensions alone such as malls, theme parks and museums but it arouses the notion of personal or subjective space which is interpreted as symbolic sites (Oswald, 1996). For instance, “people don’t just go to the shopping mall to buy something they need - they go to see and be seen, and to internalise icons of consumer culture in the form of lifestyle shopping” (Oswald, 1996, p. 2).

Here it seems necessary to make clear the differences between place and space: ‘place’ is by and large concerned with a geographical or physical setting such as location, locale, or region, but ‘space’ is rather considered an empty place which can be filled with the cultural semiotics of ‘place’ (Goodman et al., 2010). However, as Manuel-Navarrete and Redclift (2010) argue, the idea of place possesses both the potential to signal location and the association of meanings with location. Therefore, the concept of place may be negotiable but it is important to recognise that most places include particular purposes with the role of control that guides people in certain ways. For example, the compositions of shopping malls such as architecture, window displays, escalators and visual cues guide and control of shoppers’ gaze or movements inside the malls (Oswald, 1996). However, within the mall as a place, shoppers create a private space which is filled with their own social life and identity by having the experiences of consumer culture through the form of lifestyle shopping. Then a shopping mall is more likely to be interpreted as the public ‘place’ and at the same time, it is a personal ‘space’ which has the socio-semiotic function to communicate and socially interact with others (Oswald, 1996). In this sense, space is not simply a static location or a destination where members meet but it becomes a meaningful entity which a particular culture or style is constructed and presented (Glass, 2012). In other words, space plays a symbolic
role of (sub) culture as a socio-cultural milieu. Then space becomes place which produces webs of meanings and connections between people, thereby bringing a sense of community and identity, which in turn paves the way for collective action (Chatzidakis et al., 2012). Moreover, Kates’s (2002) study about gay consumers shows that in the bounded geographical place and social space, gay subculture permeates into every aspect of life, including work, sex, leisure, friends and consumption. For instance, “men felt safe enough to cruise other men (i.e. look at them as potential sexual prospects), particularly in front of ‘The Steps,’ located in front of a local coffee shop frequented by many gay men” (Kates, 2002, p. 386). In other words, the gay ghetto explicitly includes the freedom of race, gender, politics, or diverse expressions of sexuality through diverse sets of consumption practices. It implies that space makes a kind of boundary which produces the notion of inclusivity and exclusivity. Within a particular subcultural space, there are some shared rituals, values, and norms in a conspicuous as well as an inconspicuous manner. For example, in the gay ghetto, openly condemning others’ sexual orientation and the relevant activities or behaviours is explicitly discouraged (Kates, 2002). In the Exarcheian community, there are various forms of collective action to pursue more communal and anti-consumerist lifestyle, for instance, the widespread use of graffiti, insertions of artwork and table games in public spaces, and the creation of guerrilla parks that encapsulate and express residents’ actions against the commodification and private appropriation of public space (Chatzidakis et al., 2012). At the same time, there is exclusion in which mainstream society and figures of authority are unwelcome in the area of Exarcheia (Chatzidakis et al., 2012):

“. . . And then he said that he works in an arms-trading company and we all froze, we were left with our mouths open . . . He had come from work and he was wearing a suit and he was going on about how he feels stupid wearing a tie in Exarcheia, as this is not the kind of place to dress like this . . .” (Female, member of Exarcheia-based collective)

The residents in Exarcheia make a distinction from the mainstream by pursuing particular value-based consumption practices. Even though there is no explicit physical
boundary, there is a social space which allows the insiders to have culturally specific behaviours and actions that make a distinction from others. In other words, there are symbolic boundaries which construct a certain cultural space and place where subcultural behaviours, practices and activities can spontaneously happen. Then space and place create social life and interrelations but at the same time, social life and interrelations produce space and place as well (Soja, 1980, 1996).

2.5.5. Summary

A considerable body of literature suggests that contemporary society is a consumer culture - where an individual endeavours to create the self and our social life operates in the sphere of consumption (Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Firat and Venkatesh, 1994; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Elliott, 1997; Slater, 1997). Products we buy, activities we do, and philosophies or belief that we pursue tell stories about who we are, so all these processes constitute a self-creation project. This is in line with the presentation of the total formation of the self which belongs to the notion of style. As individuals construct their own style and negotiate, share and experience their identities with others, they construct a social structure, community or group which is a distinctive set of social world. This is so called ‘subculture’ (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

The concept of subculture has been well employed in consumer research because it shows how a particular consumer culture is developed and presented through consumption practices (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Ethical consumption as a distinctive set of culture also can be understood based in the context of subculture. Ethical consumers present their ethical ethos, values and identities through their own consumption practices. They construct their own social world or group, and share them with the like-minded people. This sometimes goes against the mainstream marketplace so it can be considered to be consumer resistance, and at the same time, consumer creativity.

It seems that there is a close relationship between ethical consumption and subculture. However, this thesis does not categorise ethical consumption as a subculture because
some features of subculture do not mix with the nature of ethical consumption such as disorder, delinquency or deviance (Muggleton, 2007).

Instead ethical consumption is understood as a meaningful entity of consumer creativity which produces webs of connections between ethical consumers, brings a sense of network, and accommodates collective actions of ethical consumption. This is associated with the notion of social space which plays a role of sharing rituals, values and norms such as culturally specific behaviours, and making a distinction from others.
Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presented a detailed overview of past studies relevant to understanding ethical consumption and which adopt a socio-cultural understanding of consumption. This perspective seeks to understand the social, complex, often irrational and unpredictable nature of consumer behaviour (Goulding, 1999). Bringing socio-cultural lens to understanding ethical consumption was found to be under-developed in the literature of consumer research and marketing. In this study I seek to identify and explore how ethical consumption is understood, displayed and performed by investigating the social and cultural world of ethical consumers.

This chapter presents and justifies the methodological strategy of this thesis. The structure of this chapter is as follows: first the research questions based on the discussion of research objectives will be explained. Following on from this, the philosophical and theoretical position of the methodology (including ontology and epistemology) will be discussed as it is an important and central area of enquiry (Williams and May, 1996). Next the processes of sampling and gaining access to the research field will be described. Then a detailed discussion of data collection methods and the data analysis will be made. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of ethical issues and methodological implications.

3.2 Research questions

This thesis aims to identify and explore the socio-cultural context of ethical consumption by looking at the behaviour (practices, activities and performances) manifested by the participants (as the members of a social group) through physical events and activities they participate in, and how meaning is constructed through these experiences. In terms of scoping out the extent of a particular phenomenon, problem or behaviour, this thesis supports the use of the terms ‘identify’ and ‘explore’ within its
objectives. This is in line with what Reiter (2013, p. 7) explains, “… instead of looking for the essence behind a word or concept, we need to explore what aspect of reality this word opens up for us and what a specific word allows us to see, or what aspect of reality it refers to.” This thesis is not about finding a definite answer or solution of a particular subject but about understanding and appreciating the complex dynamics of ethical consumption by looking at the social world of an ethical consumer group.

Each social world has a style which reflects the whole of one’s identity and shows a socially constructed totality (Mitchell, 1983; Ouellet, 1994; Kidder, 2005). In order to understand the distinctiveness of a social world, there is a need to view it in its context, to move into the culture, and experience what it is like to be a part of it (Krauss, 2005). The goal of this thesis is to understand the social world of a self-defined ethical consumer group in South Korea. In order to achieve this goal, this thesis looks at how ethical consumption is conceived and performed by them. In particular this thesis focuses on the individuals located in a social group which recognises the importance of the group context established in the literature review and which has been largely absent in studies of ethical consumption. Moreover, the unique cultural background of South Korea plays an important role in this thesis and this will be further explained in section 3.4.

In line with the research goal, there are three research questions:

1) How is ethical consumption displayed and performed by the members of a self-defined ethical consumer group in South Korea?

2) How is the meaning of ethical consumption activities created and perceived by a group of ethical consumers?

3) Why do participants create and perform various types of ethical consumption activities?

The research questions reveal my intentions of exploring and describing as I
intentionally used the terms ‘how’ and ‘why’ rather than using the term ‘what’. The types of ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are in line with an interpretative approach which aims to ‘understand’ a particular situation or phenomenon (Elliott and Timulak, 2005; Punch and Oancea, 2014). This thesis attempts to understand the meanings and values participants give to the issue of ethical consumption and the related activities by looking at the way they interact with them. As the nature of the world is formed as experiential, personal, subjective and socially constructed, different people may construct meanings in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon (Wellington et al., 2005). By the same token, ethical consumption can be interpreted and understood in various ways. Crotty (1998, p. 8) argues that, “there is no meaning without a human mind because meaning is constructed by human beings as we engage with the world we are interpreting.”

For instance, there is a situation to communicate between two people by using a language. If I ask you to say the opposite of the following phrase ‘I don’t know’, you may say either ‘I know’ or ‘wonk t’nod I’. I assume that most people might choose to say the first one but it is possible to choose the second one by understanding the term ‘opposite’ as a reverse order rather than antonym. At least I, as a South Korean who uses English as a second language could not entirely disagree with this argument. This is because there are fundamental differences between English and Korean in terms of the structure and the format of the language (Lee et al., 2012). What it implies is that a speaker delivers a particular meaning with a particular intention but a listener sometimes understands it in a different way. Another example is about the recognition of space and order. In Korea there was a documentary programme created and produced by EBS (Educational Broadcasting System), which was about an experiment about investigating differences between Westerners and Easterners. The picture below was shown to the participants and the researcher asked a question: “which one is the front one?”
Interestingly most Easterners chose C but most Westerners chose A. Arguably this simple experiment shows the existence of cultural differences between the Westerner and the Easterner. In this vein, based on experiences and backgrounds of each person, a view towards a particular situation or a subject could be different from each other.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 21) stress that:

“[s]ubjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts or stories, about what they did and why.”

Following this, I do not merely see and observe the subject matter but what I ultimately attempt to offer is my own reflection of the stories and accounts given by participants. With the belief that there is no definite, objective or scientific answer to my research questions, the importance lies not in determining a right or wrong answer. What is significant is to understand the social world which is created and negotiated between human beings (Oliver, 2004) and recognise my own interpretive role in creating this understanding. As such, “we can never be sure that we have understood reality properly - or that we ever can - or that our own understandings can really be judged more valid than someone else’s” (Bachman and Schutt, 2013, p. 74).

In this vein, my own preferences, beliefs, values and interactions with others are acknowledged to influence the overall research from the setting the research questions to the findings. This set of beliefs belongs to an interpretive mode of inquiry in which
Alvesson and Deetz (2000, p. 1) describe:

“It is usually or typically oriented to the inductive study of socially constructed reality focusing on meanings, ideas and practices, taking the native’s point of view seriously without questioning either the wider context of it or the process forming it.”

The selection of interpretive research approach raises a discussion of where researchers ‘are coming from’ in terms of two sets of assumptions: ontological and epistemological assumptions. This is in line with the researcher’s philosophical and theoretical position which establishes the basis of the aims and shapes the selection/rejection of particular methodology and methods (Bachman and Schutt, 2013). A more in-depth discussion of these issues will be provided in section 3.3.

3.3 Philosophical assumptions: Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is concerned with the nature or essence of things (Wellington et al., 2005). In other words it is about the study of ‘being: the nature of existence’ which is associated with understanding ‘what is’ (Crotty, 1998). Thus, the ontological assumptions are about taking a particular approach to social enquiry regarding the nature of social reality (Blaikie, 1993). As the research questions I have outlined show, this thesis seeks to understand how the social world of ethical consumption is experienced and constructed by the people who live in it. What it implies is that this thesis is underpinned by the belief that the social reality is seen as socially constructed and subjectively experienced (Wellington et al., 2005). This is a social constructivist ontological assumption which Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 35) argue:

“Searching for universally applicable social laws can distract from learning what people know and how they understand their lives. The interpretive social researcher examines meanings that have been socially constructed… There is not one reality out there to be measured; objects and events are understood by different people differently, and those perceptions are the reality - or realities -
What is stressed here is that we cannot know the ‘true’ nature of the object world because the world is interpreted through the mind (Williams and May, 1996). This is fundamentally different from the positivist belief which holds a different another ontological position that the social world is seen as external, independent, given and which is objectively real - it exists apart from the perceptions of those who observe it (Bachman and Schutt, 2013). Positivist philosophy is traditionally associated with science (Weber, 1949) so having an objective and unbiased view to clearly see reality is of great importance. The essence of scientific method is to allow researchers to independently and impartially test pre-existing theories and prior findings (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Then a deductive approach is adopted as it begins with a theoretical system, operationalises the concepts of that system and then sets out to gather empirical data to test that system (Williams and May, 1996). Thus, the process of deduction is done in settings artificially created by the researcher (Murphy et al., 1998).

In contrast, a social constructivist ontological assumption follows the belief that there is more than one reality, an inductive approach is necessary which starts with the collection of data in naturally occurring settings and from which you can derive a general conclusion or principle (William and May, 1996).

The ontological and epistemological positions tend to emerge together and form the philosophical basis of a research project (Crotty, 1998; Nagy et al., 2011). If ontology is about a certain way of understanding ‘what is’, epistemology is about ‘how we know what we know’ (Crotty, 1998). Wellington et al. (2005, p. 101) define epistemology as:

"The nature of knowledge, with what constitutes knowledge, with where knowledge comes from and whose knowledge it is, and with what it is possible to know and understand and re-present."

My epistemological assumption lies in an interpretative position which asserts that “there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it but truth comes into existence in our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). I do not disagree
with the existence of knowledge rather I disagree with the view that there is definite and objective knowledge which could be discovered and measured. I follow Johnson et al. (1984, p. 75) who claim that the world we see around us could be understood based on our own preferences, prejudices and our interactions with others:

“Hunger, pain and anger in the human world cannot be described without investigating how individuals use language and symbols to construct what such states mean for them. For it is only by understanding the individual experience of subjective interpretation that we will understand why human beings behave in the way they do; why, for instance, thresholds of pain, attitudes to death, and so on, differ so markedly from person to person, and from culture to culture.”

As the interpretive research paradigm presumes, there are multiple perspectives within any given community so that an importance lies in understanding the perspectives held by study populations (Mack et al., 2005).

Ontological and epistemological assumptions significantly influence the choice and use of methodology and methods as they contribute to the overall research (Oliver, 2004; Wellington et al., 2005). As this thesis seeks to explore the experience of ethical consumers in order to understand the social world they live, the practical way to obtain this aim is to talk to, question and explore the experiences of the people involved. This is “to understand the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). In terms of getting into households or communities in order to have local points of view and acquire funds of knowledge (Moll and Greenberg, 1990), this thesis seeks to identify significant categories of human experience up close and personal. This is in line with ethnography in which the intent is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice (Hoey, 2013). The spirit of ethnographic inquiry seeks to uncover meanings and perceptions of the participants that are set against the backdrop of the people’s overall worldview or ‘culture’ (Crotty, 1998). In particular Arnould (1998) argues that ethnography in consumer research does not contribute to find generalisable and pluralistic accounts of consumption but tends to be particularistic.
Ethnography has its roots in the fields of anthropology and sociology but it has been used and practiced in organisational studies or consumer research as well (Genzuk, 2003). Hammersley (1985, p. 152) defines ethnography as:

“...it is a form of research in which the social settings to be studied, however familiar to the researcher, must be treated as anthropologically strange; and the task is to document the culture - the perspectives and practices - of the people in these settings. The aim is to ‘get inside’ the way each group of people sees the world.”

Ethnography is essentially the study of a particular cultural group or phenomenon including cultural interpretation (Riemer, 2012). Fetterman (1989, p. 28) claims that, “cultural interpretation involves the ability to describe what the researcher has heard and seen within the framework of the social groups’ view of reality.” Ethnography is not only concerned with what people are and how they interact, but also tries to reveal what lies beneath (Wiersma, 1986).

Hoey (2013) argues that ethnography may be defined as both a qualitative research method (process) and product (outcome) which aims at having cultural interpretation. If the emphasis lies in fieldwork (alternatively, participant observation) conducted by a single investigator who ‘lives with and lives like’ those who are studied, usually for a year or more (Van Maanen, 1996), ethnography is considered to be a method. However, if focusing on the outcome of ethnography, it is understood as a written description of a particular culture - the customs, beliefs, and behaviour based on information collected through fieldwork (Harris and Johnson, 2000). In this case, ethnography could be considered to be a type of research tradition or research approach rather than a research method. The distinction between a method and an approach is connected to what we mean when we refer to methodology and methods. According to Wellington et al. (2005, p. 97), “methodology is concerned with the theoretical and overall approach to a research project and methods are the specific techniques for obtaining the data.” For example, ethnography (methodology) is done through various kinds of techniques (methods) such as observation, interviews, documentary analysis, and sometimes even
questionnaires (Crotty, 1998; Wellington et al., 2005). This thesis focuses not only on reporting events and details of experience but also explains how these represent what we might call ‘webs of meaning’ (Geertz, 1973), namely the cultural constructions in which we live. In this vein, this thesis puts emphasis on interpretation of the meanings and functions of actions and practices rather than the processes of collecting data from fieldwork. As such, this thesis takes an ethnographic approach by employing multifaceted qualitative methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

3.4 Sampling

As this thesis focuses on how people understand and conduct ethical consumption, there is a need to consider the minimal qualification of research population. Researchers recognise that some informants are ‘richer’ than others as these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding for the researcher. For instance, “choosing someone conveniently to answer a qualitative question would be analogous to randomly asking a passer-by how to repair a broken down car, rather than asking a garage mechanic - the former might have a good stab, but asking the latter is likely to be more productive” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). What this implies is that convenience sampling is not the most effective way in this kind of research which seeks to develop an understanding of complex issues relating to human behaviour. A strategy to deliberately select particular settings, persons or events in order to provide important information and answer research questions is necessary (Maxwell, 1996). In this sense, this thesis employs purposive sampling in which the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question (Marshall, 1996).

The process of sampling decisions in this research is composed of three stages: the choice of the research site, the type of sample and the selection of sample. Regarding the choice of the research site, the empirical study was conducted in South Korea due to the following reasons. First of all, the capital city of South Korea, Seoul recently faced the time of revolution and that is, in 2011 the new mayor of Seoul was elected to a person who was a civil-rights lawyer and a civil activist. He was also famous for
establishing ‘The Beautiful Foundation’ which was motivated by the Oxfam in the UK. It pursued a vision of a world filled with rich beauty, where extremes of wealth and poverty are eliminated. It aimed at a just and affluent society arguing that a society with unequal affluence is unjust. The Beautiful Foundation (2012) emphasised a vision of a society that must consist of honest, devoted, diligent, and caring individuals providing aid and assistance to the underprivileged, the disenfranchised, and those who fall through the cracks. In line with his interests in social issues and his political preferences, he focused on the notion of a social economy which is able to exist within the market economy³ (Lee, 2012). According to Moularet and Ailenei (2005), the social economy essentially is made up of the voluntary, non-profit and co-operative sectors in which their market activities pursue the goals of achieving social development. The new mayor of Seoul started to make and announce some policies related to social firms, cooperative stores and fair trade that have a direct influence on prospering ethical consumption in various ways. At this time Korea is now enjoying a steep and steady growth in ethical consumption in the last decade (Lee, 2009) and this indicates it is a viable and interesting research site.

The second reason for choosing South Korea is because understanding the particular context in which the events or actions held by the people involved in this thesis is significant. This is because understanding a deep level of social and cultural meanings embedded in this context is central to what is known as the ‘interpretive’ approach to social science (Geertz, 1973; Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979; Bredo and Feinberg, 1982) and also was identified in Chapter 2 as a significant neglect in studies of ethical consumption. It includes understanding subtle nuances about the overall society such as sarcasm with politics, the usage of abbreviation and the trends of the popular culture, etc. As I lived in Seoul for more than 20 years, I, as a researcher, have an ability to closely understand the context and to interpret participants’ views and comments.

Finally, even though the topic of ethical consumption has become a social phenomenon in Korea, there are relatively few academic studies. Ethical consumption studies with

---

³ A market economy is about free market system in which decisions regarding investment, production, consumption, distribution and price levels are made by the individuals or organisations seeking their own advantage (Gregory and Stuart, 2004).
the South Korean context are limited to investigating one particular category such as the purchasing intention of the Fair Trade coffee (Yoo and Noh, 2011). Moreover, most ethical consumption studies have been conducted using quantitative methods and there are no studies which offer an in-depth understanding of ethical consumption using an ethnographic approach.

After choosing South Korea as the research site, I focused on the people who were interested in ethical consumption. They could be categorised in various ways, for example, students who theoretically learn ethical consumption, mothers who are concerned about healthy food or activists who show their identities and beliefs by participating in some demonstrations or campaigns, etc. These do not align with the demographic or geographic markers, making these not valid for categorising them. I have focused on the people who voluntarily showed an interest in ethical consumption in various ways such as conducting some kinds of actions, purchasing ethical products or joining in a certain type of group. This is because a voluntary involvement with ethical related consumption implies an interest in them.

I sought to select a group of people rather than the individual consumer because one of the aims of this research is to go beyond the individual decision making model (see details in section 4.2). A limited number of recent studies have emphasised the importance of social context in ethical consumption arguing that the experience of ethically involved consumption is not solely based on an individual (desired) identity but based rather on a social one including cultural background, personal histories and collective participation (Caru and Cova, 2003; Shaw et al., 2006; Cherrier, 2007). In this study I choose to follow these recent advances and seek to identify a group of ethical consumers. There were several ethical consumption groups in South Korea such as campaign groups which were formed and run by conglomerates (under the mission of corporate social responsibility) or activist groups such as the environmentalist or Greenpeace. However, some people joined these kinds of groups with a certain purpose such as career establishment rather than an authentic interest in ethical consumption. This was similar with what Holdsworth (2010) argued, that many students used volunteering as a way of enhancing their employability. An attempt to add numerous
activities and experiences in their CV was popularly made among young Koreans in these days. This is so called the phenomenon of ‘making your own spec’ and the term ‘spec’ is the abbreviation of specification (Kyuk, 2013). Specification in here means the factors the unemployed should have in order to apply for employment such as educational records, the certification of English tests, internships, etc. Experiences of joining activist groups or volunteering could be one of them. This made the selection of the group of ethical consumers important in order to ensure that there was an authentic interest in ethical consumption.

Among various groups or organisations in this field, I initially found the BORA group’s blog and website on the Internet and some of their activities and induction were explained with some photos and videos. The group did not extensively advertise or actively introduce themselves in the mass media but whenever I typed the term ‘ethical consumption’ in Korean google, the name of BORA came up. They showed their ethical identities through a diversity of ethical consumption activities. They did not focus merely on one issue (i.e. Greenpeace focuses only on the environmental issues) which could limit the view toward ethical consumption but covered the overall ethical issues. Moreover, they didn’t stick to stereotypical types of activities such as conducting campaigns holding pickets on the streets or sharing information about ethical products or ethical brands. My first impression was that the activities and the group seemed quite creative and fun. I also found the BORA interesting in terms of having no connections with any profit-oriented or political organisations.

To summarise, by using a purposive sampling, the participants were selected from among the members of an ethical consumer group in South Korea called ‘BORA’. Further details about the BORA will be given in section 3.4.2 and 4.1.

3.4.1 Gaining access

It is not always easy for researchers to gain access to the research field in terms of obtaining permission (Oliver, 2004). I was also concerned about this issue. I approached the BORA through an email to the group’s generic email address. From this
I received a response offering further information on the BORA and other ethical consumption related groups in Korea. Following a series of emails a rapport was established with the core members of the BORA and eventually they agreed to receive a copy of the research proposal, subject to it being written in Korean. It was apparent that one of the core members was acting as a gatekeeper. In total 14 emails (see Appendix 1) were exchanged before the fieldwork was approved by the organisation’s gatekeeper. I remained a little insecure about this due to the distance and the need to travel to Korea, plus the possibility that the email correspondence was insufficient to firm up the relationship. In other words, as I had to visit Korea from the UK in order to conduct the fieldwork, gaining access through emails was a kind of challenge for me. More specifically, I was personally worried about the case that when I actually visited Korea and met them, they could change their minds and not be involved in my thesis. Mulhall (2003) also claims that entrance may be denied if consciously or unconsciously the researcher does not meet the cultural expectations of a gatekeeper. As gaining access involves a process of managing the personal and psychological aspect in particular self-identity which could fit into the culture of field site (Waddington, 1994), I put considerable time and effort to strive for ‘cultural acceptability’ with the gatekeeper and participants in research site. I looked up some of the contents uploaded on the BORA’s blog in order to acknowledge and understand the cultural practices, values and norms at the research site. In order to convince the gatekeeper that I was non-threatening and to minimise any ethical problems, I also offered a detailed explanation about informed consent forms for observation and interviews. Through these processes, I tried to confirm and re-confirm about the permission before the fieldwork.

I initially felt that gaining access to the participant group and obtaining permission was easier than I had expected. However, while exchanging emails I noticed that the gatekeeper kept asking me to offer my research proposal. It wasn’t a strong, direct or rude voice to request my research proposal but after the first meeting I felt that it was an invisible signal to create a distance from me. As the BORA group members had a very clear belief regarding ethical consumption or any other following social issues, they worried that I as a new-comer could obtain information for any inappropriate purposes. For instance, they could think of the situation that I could make a negative or
controversial remark on their activities and perspectives regarding ethical consumption. That is why I suggest that they wanted to read my research proposal to understand my views towards the concept of ethical consumption.

During the process of obtaining permission, I had to be aware of Korean customs. I was important to reveal myself as a PhD student, offering personal information such as name, age, affiliation, occupation, etc. This is because compared to Westerners who hold egocentric projection, Eastern cultures, especially Koreans, tend to have relational projection and consider other people’s identities, thoughts and beliefs important (Lee et al., 2012). More specifically Koreans, influenced by Confucian ideas, focus on the relational features which play a role to clarify the relationships among people. For instance, Koreans normally do not call others’ (first) names but they prefer in an unfamiliar situation to use one’s official title with one’s surname. Thus it was important to reveal my job and affiliation at the beginning. Moreover, age is another important determinant among relationships because Koreans use honorific languages to older people (Lee et al., 2012). As the group was composed of people with various ranges of age, those who were younger than me could feel uncomfortable in terms of considering an issue of authority and power. This issue will be further discussed in section 4.1. Furthermore, conducting an overt participant observation was another important condition. The reason why I chose to do an overt fieldwork was not just limited to the methodological reasons such as having room to observe them in order to avoid any taken-for-granted features. I also sought an open relationship with the participants by clearly revealing who I was and why I was there. In addition, conducting an overt observation could reduce ethical dilemmas. Conducting undercover research raises ethical issues such as the form of deception (Taylor and Bogdan, 1975). At the beginning I considered conducting a covert participant observation by pretending to be a new member of the BORA group. I believed that this was an effective way to collect the natural, raw, in-depth and detailed data as I could be fully involved in the group. However after the fieldwork, as one of the findings shows, I realised that the BORA group members actually distinguished authentic members who have a real interest in ethical consumption activities from pretenders who have false purposes to join the group. This was one of the most significant factors when they selected new members.
Conducting a covert participant observation is problematic and stands out with common expectations of the University of Leicester Ethics framework. With the benefit of hindsight, that is, reflecting on my findings in the field, I can also see that covert observation would have been ineffective as I would have been a marginal member and core members may not have revealed their thoughts, actions, reflections, and intentions to me.

3.4.2 About the BORA

The BORA group is supported by the SEEDS, a non-profit organisation which focuses mainly on bringing up young social entrepreneurs creating a sustainable and innovative model of social firms and producing the civil platforms of the sustainable environments for social firms (the SEEDS, 2013). The BORA is an independent entity which has its own style and culture which plays a fundamental role to develop activities. The issue of whether the participant group is connected to any other organisations which have particular purposes such as profit-oriented firms or political parties is considered significant. This is because if the selected participant group is run by conglomerates or other profit-oriented organisations, the issue of power relations cannot be ignored. For instance, if the group is supported by a particular political organisation, the group members may feel necessary to follow and conduct the activities guided and developed by the organisation. For this reason, the selection of the participant group is not based on investigating the quintessential sociological factors of race, class, and gender but based on highlighting another thread within the culture (Geertz, 1973).

The BORA was launched in July 2010 and every six months new members are recruited, forming a new group. The overall vision and the general direction of the group activities were developed by the initial members. The recruiting processes and the activities conducted were planned and developed by the existing group members so all activities among groups were changeable (see Appendix 2). In other words, every group had different types of activities and this phenomenon was also influenced by some external factors such as seasonal condition. For example, as the Table 3 shows, the activities of group 1 and group 3 were conducted during winter in which the
condition of a very cold and harsh weather including a heavy fall of snow is normal in South Korea. Their activities were quite limited to the indoor practices such as discussion meetings. On the other hand, the activities of group 2 and group 4 were conducted during spring and summer so a large proportion of their activities were composed of outdoor practices such as campaigning at the Fair Trade festivals.

**Table 3** Periods of each group’s activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BORA group</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>Finish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>July, 2010</td>
<td>December, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>February, 2011</td>
<td>August, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>September, 2011</td>
<td>February, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>March, 2012</td>
<td>August, 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From September 2011 to February 2012, Group 3 conducted their activities and from March to August 2012, Group 4 conducted their activities. As the fieldwork for this thesis was conducted from January to June 2012, I as a researcher joined both Group 3 and Group 4’s activities. Observing both group 3 and group 4 was significant as one part of this thesis focused on group membership and was interested to observe any differences between the existing members and the new members or any changes from a novice to a senior member. There is a theoretical interest in learning and understanding of members in a group (see details in section 2.5.3.4). A full description of the BORA will be given in section 4.1.

### 3.5 Data collection

Data collection consisted primarily of an ethnographic approach using multifaceted qualitative research methods: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, netnography, secondary data analysis and visual methods. In particular, I focused on immersing myself in the setting of the experience through participant observation of various types of events, meetings and activities. This observational approach helped me to understand the participants’ world: their use of language or their behaviour which can only be found by living with them (Becker, 1958; Elliott and Jankel-Elliot, 2003; Baker and Foy, 2008). Mack et al. (2005) also claim that there is no substitute for
witnessing or participating in phenomena of human interaction. Moreover, in order to listen to the participants’ detailed stories, 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken.

3.5.1 Participant observation

After gaining access to the research field via email, I had the first meeting with the gatekeeper and the main BORA members on the middle of December 2011. As the fieldwork was planned to commence in January 2012, I wanted to be familiar with the group before the actual fieldwork. Oliver (2004, p. 135) also argues that, “when ethnographers are researching a setting with which they are not familiar, then it inevitably takes them some time to orientate themselves towards the setting, and to determine the kind of observations they would like initially to make.” During December, I regularly visited the place in which the BORA members had meetings and I met some people from the previous BORA groups and the staff of the parent company SEEDS. I sometimes had lunch with them and chatted with them dealing with various topics including ethical consumption. At first they treated me like an official researcher calling me ‘Dr. Lee’ even though I asked them not to call me ‘Dr. Lee’. Moreover, I was younger than some of the members but they used highly honorific language to me. These kinds of signs placed a distance between me and other BORA members. However, after having several meetings, I felt that they started to reduce the distance and they were considered me as a comfortable person to be with. For example, they started to call me ‘sister’ or my actual name which is much more informal and easy. This change in language demonstrated a reduction in distance in the fieldwork setting - an immersion and acceptance. Moreover, they invited me to join their mobile chat room which was private, even sharing some off-the-record information. What it implies is that they showed a variety of uncontrolled situations and settings which would probably occur in much the same way if I was not present. It was an important aspect as the researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like for an ‘insider’ while remaining, inevitably, an ‘outsider’ (Mack et al., 2005).

From January 2012 to June 2012, I officially immersed myself within the BORA,
joining a variety of types of activities and events. The BORA adopts an ‘activity’ based approach as it allows them to experience and think about what ethical consumption is like. Cherrier (2007) claimed that consumers critically analyse their personal ethical concerns and self-concepts through the experiences of actively participating in their ethical consumption lifestyles. In the BORA the activities were largely divided into two types: pre-planned activities and naturally occurring activities, for instance, small and large-scale meetings, festivals, after festivals, external events, orientation workshop and recruit interviews, etc. (see Table 4). As there were no standard or any set rules to follow within the group, all the processes from the planning to the actual conduct of these activities were managed by the group members. There is no hierarchy which is very unusual in Korean social groupings.

Table 4 Types of activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type 1. Pre-planned activities</th>
<th>Type 2. Spontaneously occurring activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal (by BORA group)</td>
<td>Small-scale meetings (for the primary members), Regular gatherings (for the whole members), Big Issue Campaign, Fair Trade Festival, Orientation workshop, Recruit interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External (by other organisations)</td>
<td>Vision talk show, Big Issue education meeting, Used books reading club, One day dining house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After festival gathering, After orientation workshop gathering, Dining engagements after meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the six months of observations, I joined 36 activities with the two groups (see details in Appendix 3.1). From January to February 2012, I joined group 3 which had started the BORA activities in September 2011. As each group undertook activities for six months, group 3 was in the final stage of their activities. With group 3, I participated in 17 activities in total. From March to June 2012, I joined group 4 so I could experience the beginning and middle stage of their activities. With group 4, I participated in 19 activities in total. It implied that the observation involved a comparative approach between a relatively experienced group and a novice group. In particular, as the level of knowledge and exposure to ethical consumption was different between group 3 and group 4, the way to create new activities and adapt themselves to the circumstances was different as well. During the first few weeks, group 3 members
guided group 4 by offering some stories about the previous experiences involving know-how. In particular as some of the group 3 members already had various experiences and built networks in this area, they offered information about external events or potential partnership projects. Once group 4 members who were relatively new presented their ideas, the experienced members suggested the possible ways to actually make them feasible.

I, as a participant observer, chose to take part in all the central activities of the group while also documenting my observations rather than becoming either a complete observer (outsider) who simply observes and documents the event or behaviour being studied, or a complete participant (insider) namely an actual member of the group (see Gold, 1958). In Glass’s (2012, p. 700) ethnography study of the punk scene in a small college town, it is called ‘slight insider’ status which helped the researcher achieve “a nice balance of integration and distance in the data collection and analysis.” Instead of pretending to be an ethical consumer, I proved myself as a researcher because maintaining a distance from the normal perspective of the ethical consumers can help avoid the taken-for-granted actions and attitudes to understand the ethical consumers’ world (see Latour and Woolgar [1979] on ‘making the familiar strange’). Baker and Foy (2008) also argue that people are unaware of their actions which are so habitual or integrated into other behaviour patterns. By being directly involved in the observation, I was able to read the very detailed cultural codes involving the language, ideologies, and styles of the participant group. One of the interesting things that I found was the topic of their conversations when I interacted with people socially outside of a research environment such as at a bar, public meeting place, streets, bus depot or market. I noticed that a lot of members overtly and implicitly revealed a particular preference in political parties when they talked about the current social and political issues. Maybe their conversations about these issues were a natural result as the new mayor of Seoul who was a civil activist started to proclaim an investment to social firms and ethical consumption-related events in Seoul. During the period of fieldwork, it was quite easy to see articles regarding these issues in mass media. However, as the press have different social and political characteristics and inclinations, articles regarding ethical consumption were described and covered in different ways. The BORA members
sometimes supported or criticised some of the articles and this type of conversations revealed their political and social views. However, as there was a possibility that some members couldn’t reveal their views which could be different from the dominant view within the group especially in the relational culture, I explored each participant’s opinions during the semi-structured interviews.

While attending the events or activities, I took notes of the observation and informal conversations building them up into the field notes upon returning home. While writing up each field note after the event, I also kept a personal diary which was a useful record of my cognitive and emotional experience, and allowed me to conduct personal introspection (Shanker, 2000; Elliott and Jankel-Elliot, 2003). Introspection in this thesis was my own cultural knowledge considering myself as the informant (Wallace, 1972) and my personal experiences pertaining to the topic under investigation (Brown and Reid, 1997). As every ethnographer and observer has one’s own preferred strategies for recording the data from observations (Mulhall, 2003), I built my own format of field note that was divided into three sections: factual, descriptive and reflexive. The factual section was about the fundamental information such as the date, place, the number of people, the topic of the event, etc. The descriptive section was much more like a drawing of the observation that describes how people behave, interact, dress, move and talk, etc. The reflexive section was a kind of personal diary including my thoughts and feeling about going into the field and being there. I also wrote about any features that were quite new and unfamiliar to me as this kind of reflections on my own life experiences might influence the way in which I filter what I observe (Mulhall, 2003).

Moreover, with the permission in advance, photographs and videos were taken by me during the fieldwork to capture some of the visual richness (Holbrook, 1998). Before conducting the fieldwork, all participants were notified about taking photos or videos during the observation or interviews and they were happy with it by signing the consent form. Further details about the visual contents will be discussed in section 3.6.

3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews
During participant observation, conversations between myself and individuals emerged within the participant group. These conversations were a useful source to further investigate the participants’ views. I found semi-structured interviews particularly useful to get the story behind a participant’s experiences. I collected the participants’ histories and experiences of joining the BORA which could not be acquired from participant observation. Semi-structured interviews are often seen as beneficial as a follow-up investigation tool to explore issues from other types of methods such as questionnaires or participant observation (McNamara, 1999). As this thesis employed participant observation as another key method, conducting semi-structured interviews could achieve a balance between the researcher’s understanding from the fieldwork and the participants’ own voices.

Semi-structured interviews have been defined by Minichiello et al. (1990, p. 19) as “repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words.” Qualitative research interviews seek to describe and understand the meanings of what the interviewees say in relation to their life (Kvale, 1996). The main goal of the data collection was to investigate meanings and values of the participants’ experiences and understandings. Thus, listening to the participants’ thoughts, stories and opinions through their own voices took an important role in terms of collecting a rich and deep level of data. Among various types of interviews in qualitative research, I employed a set of semi-structured interviews as it involves a certain degree of structure but allowed room to pursue topics of particular interest to the participants (Leidner, 1993).

According to MacDougall and Fudge (2001), people who already participate in a formal group or collective may feel comfortable to speak within that collective in a focus group situation. Then focus group interviews could be a possible method to be used in this thesis. Focus groups are co-constructed through interaction between people in the group so they are useful in terms of understanding meanings negotiated and assigned to practices and experiences within this group context (Wilkinson, 2004). Moreover, the group interaction can stimulate respondents by aiding to recall and
elaborating so that richer information could be obtained, compared to individual interviews with the same participants (Fontana and Frey, 1994; Asbury, 1995). As Seale (2004, p. 198) puts it,

“Focus groups capture the inherently interactive and communicative nature of social action and social meanings, in ways that are inaccessible to research methods that take the individual as their basic unit of analysis.”

Despite various strengths of using focus group interviews, I rather chose to employ one-to-one semi-structured interviews in this thesis. This is because one of the benefits of focus group interviews: stimulating each other to recall a particular episode or opinion could also play a negative role. More specifically, there is a possible domination of the group by one person or a small coalition of participants (Merton et al., 1956). In particular, Koreans are conscious about the relationship with others (Lee et al., 2012). Like other Asian cultures, collectivity is one of the key characteristics of Koreans so they feel comfortable with having similar opinions with others than having their own voices (Lee et al., 2012). Merton et al. (1956) identified the danger of the reluctance of some individuals to speak and present their views at all. As explained in the section of participant observation, the conversations during the fieldwork included some sensitive issues such as political inclinations. In this vein it was important to conduct one-to-one semi-structured interviews which allowed each participant to speak and raise one’s opinions without any pressure.

This argument could be further supported by one of my field notes as follows:

*During the fieldwork I had a chance to be involved in a focus group interview which was not part of my study. A friend of one of the BORA members had an assignment for the module of ‘Popular Culture and Society’ to conduct a mini-qualitative research project in an undergraduate level. The aim of this project was to investigate how consumers present an identity or value through ethical consumption. The BORA group was selected for the sample of this other research and the employed method was a focus group interview. The interview was...*
conducted on 9th April 2012 which was the 27th day of my fieldwork. It seemed quite valuable for me to watch the focus group interview of the BORA group as this method could possibly be used in my thesis. For this reason, with the permission of both the BORA group and the interviewer, I observed the interview by recording it with my mobile phone and I took notes. I noticed some interesting points from the interview. Only a few people actively engaged in the interview by presenting their thoughts or offering any relevant examples which could support their arguments. Those few people were the main members of the BORA group who had a lot of experience of ethical consumption activities. Other members were very quiet and when they did speak, their answers were pretty much the same as the leading members’ opinions.

Following the example of Holt’s (1998) study, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to elucidate the ethical consumers’ distinct style from the usage of their own language. To open the interviews I asked open-ended, grand-tour questions (McClenk, 1988b). I asked the participants to describe their life histories or anything they were interested in. They usually began by discussing how they gained an interest in ethical consumption. I probed in-depth for personal opinions or stories about the issue of ethical consumption and the BORA group. A focal point for the interviews was to elicit the participants’ understandings and evaluations of ethical consumption in as great detail as possible including recounting their preferences and particular episodes (e.g. preferences of particular stores, the ways of choosing products, and the ways in which they consume their choices). During the participant observation, I tried to be fully immersed in the group, obtaining membership status myself and establishing a good rapport with the interviewees so the information was of a good quality in the interviews (Shankar, 2000; Elliott and Jankel-Elliot, 2003).

20 participants were selected as interviewees from among the BORA group members. Calculating the adequacy of sample sizes was based on the studies which discuss the actual sample sizes. Guest et al. (2006) find that there are only seven sources that provided guidelines for actual sample sizes but they present different sample sizes. For instance, Bernard (2000) argues that most ethnographic studies are based on 30-60
interviews, while Bertaux (1981) argues that 15 is the smallest acceptable sample size in qualitative research. A more recent study done by Baker and Edwards (2012) also shows that the size of the sample pools can be vary from one to a hundred or more. However, they argue that the advisable number is in the broad range of between a dozen and 60, with 30 being the mean. Moreover, they mention seven studies that selecting 15-50 interviewees seems reasonable for qualitative research. I also couldn’t ignore the practical issues caused during the interviews and afterward; for instance, Britten (1995) finds that for every hour of taped interview, 6-7 hours of transcription is required.

Among 20 interviewees, 10 participants were selected from among group 3 and another 10 participants were from group 4 (see details in Appendix 3.2 and 5). Some initial members who were involved in group 3 joining the activities in this period were also included for the reason that the initial members’ insider views could help to detect any features in which I as an outsider might not notice and decipher (Berger and Ward, 2010). With the interviewees from group 4, the interviews were conducted twice: at the beginning of their involvements and the middle of their activities (see Appendix 3.2.2). This is because one part of this thesis focused on a process of socialisation as Thornton (1996) argued that becoming a member of a subculture generally means entering as an aspiring member and undergoing a process of socialisation whereby subcultural capital is obtained (see section 2.5.3.4). I believed that this is not the only case for a subculture but for a group or an organisation as well. Additionally, one person who worked in the parent firm of the BORA, the SEEDS and took a role of a gatekeeper was interviewed in order to listen to some extra information such as the background information about the BORA and the relationships with other organisations. It was worth listening to his stories regarding the structure of the group, ethical consumption activities, the vision of the parent firm of the BORA and any under-covered stories such as funding issues.

Each interview lasted an hour to an hour and a half. Each interviewee had the freedom to choose the interview place so all the interviews were conducted in different places such as coffee shops or tea houses. Before starting the interview, each interviewee received and signed the consent form. All the interviews were conducted in Korean in
order to keep the interviewees’ original meanings of words or concepts. With the permission from the participants in advance, the interviews were audio recorded by my smart phone and imported into my computer directly. To secure this data, I copied them to another USB and kept it in my data box. All the recorded data were transcribed into written form. Further details on how the data were organised for analysis is detailed in section 3.6.

### 3.6 Collected data

The collected data were composed of field notes, interview transcripts, photographs, videos, digitally produced postings and supplemental data. As the use of photographic/visual records were well suited to capture the spatial and multi-sensorial features of the situation in relation to consumers’ behaviours (Penaloza, 1998), they were used as the supplement data to capture the aspects which cannot be verbally explained.

- Field notes
  During the fieldwork, I produced a series of field notes. Riemer (2012) claims that writing up field notes as soon as possible after collecting data is indeed essential. The contents of each field note were divided into two parts: observational/descriptive note and reflective/analytical note. The first one included the factual aspect of the observation including the transcripts from the recording files (of what the participants say). The second one was about my overall feelings or thoughts about each activity or a phenomenon. The reflection notes were produced during the fieldwork and also after the fieldwork.

- Interview transcripts
  Every interview was recorded by using my smart phone. All recording files were sent to my computer and also copied to a separate USB. I listened to each file and transcribed all of them on a word processor. I didn’t use a professional transcription service because I, as a researcher of this study, have first-hand knowledge from my involvement in the interview process, expertise in the interview subject and an
opportunity to re-visit the original data. Halcomb and Davidson (2006) argue that the process of transcription should be more about interpretation and generation of meanings from the data rather than being a simple clerical task. Poland (1995) also found that about 60% of the passages transcribed by professional transcribers in his focus group investigation contained significant transcribing errors. As the interpretation and understanding the socio-cultural aspect of the Korean context is significant in this thesis, I decided to transcribe the data by myself. Moreover, transcribing was done in the original language, Korean in order to keep the original nuances of the data that is the way to reduce the potential for errors (Twinn, 1998). A further discussion regarding the linguistic characteristics of Korean will be made in section 3.9. I transcribed each file just after the interview as I could have fresh memory. On the top of each transcript, my overall feelings, thoughts and even a very timid but important aspect about the interview were briefly written in my own words. Wengraf (2001) claims that taking memo and writing field notes during the process of listening to audio-recordings is important to capture researcher’s thoughts and interpretations.

-Photos and videos
Photos/videos were taken by me during the fieldwork. Barkin and Stone (2004) claim that photographs are the most obvious choice for integration into ethnographic field notes. Some visual contents such as the participants’ fashion style or belongings were taken with prior agreement, so some participants posed for me. Many of the visual materials were captured under the natural settings without any notice. The photos or videos taken in the natural settings can help the researcher find any unnoticed aspects during the fieldwork and add the rich details of the field notes. For instance, I captured how the participants performed during their ethical consumption activities. Moreover, some photos/videos were taken by the participants for the purpose of keeping their personal memory or keeping their activities as data to share them with other members. The photos/videos taken by the participants were sent to me via mobile phone or email as I requested them. Some photos were also uploaded on the BORA’s website or blog with a brief explanation about them.

-Postings (produced by the participants on computer-mediated communications)
The participants freely uploaded various types of data such as diaries, reviews, writings, drawings or photos, etc. on their website. Some members were responsible for uploading some contents, for example, when the primary members (so called hard-core members) had an activity planning meeting, one person had to upload the summary of the meeting. This allowed all other members who didn’t join the meeting to know what the BORA would do in the future. I tried to explore the contents displayed on online communities such as their website, their blog or their mobile chat room. This approach is in line with ‘netnography’ which is to adapt ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging though computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 2002b). I didn’t trace the postings in a regular basis because all the postings uploaded remained for a long time so I could have access to the postings for any time. Kozinets (2002b) argues that the netnographer’s choices of which data to save and which to pursue are important, and should be guided by the research question and available resources. In line with this, whenever I found some postings which were directly connected to the collected data, I captured and saved them. These data were used as they ensure balance between my view and the participants’ own point of views. Previous subculture study such as Goulding and Saren’s (2009) also undertook an analysis of gothic websites and chat rooms such as Gothic/Punk, where individuals publish their own stories and experiences in order to ensure balance with the interviews. My study follows the approach of Goulding and Saren (2009).

-Supplement (Secondary) data
To broaden my understanding of the ethical consumer world, I also collected what Lofland et al. (2006) call ‘supplementary data’: the participant group’s website and blog, the relevant newspaper articles and magazines that became a research aid (O’Hara, 2001). I believed that they were expected to be used as a reference because they showed the external views which could possibly support my arguments.

3.7 Data analysis: Thematic analysis

Cunliffe (2010, p. 651) argues that, “the meta-theoretical assumptions have very practical consequences for the way we do research and this of course involves how we
analyse the data.” From the empirical data, this thesis aims to understand a set of ethical consumers’ social world and the meanings of the whole spectrum of their style. For this, thematic analysis is employed as it is a method of qualitative data analysis which focuses mainly on understanding the meanings of the collected data in context involving systematically identifying and describing themes or patterns in great detail (Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe and Yardley, 2004). According to Namey et al. (2008, p. 138),

“Thematic goes beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas. Codes developed for ideas or themes are then applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis which may include comparing the relative frequencies of themes or topics within a data set, looking for code co-occurrence, or graphically displaying code relationships.”

It seems similar to content analysis in terms of establishing categories and then counting particular features of a text or image (Cole 1988; Joffe and Yardley, 2004). However, content analysis is defined as a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Krippendorff, 1980; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Sandelowski, 1995). In other words it partially has the characteristic of quantitative methods in terms of determining the frequencies of the occurrence of particular categories. Thematic analysis in contrast puts a greater attention to the qualitative tradition of the data analysis and requires more involvement and interpretation of the researcher. By going beyond just identifying patterns and salient themes, this thesis demonstrates variations in how social phenomena are framed, articulated, and experienced as well as the relationships within and between particular elements of such phenomena (McLellan et al., 2003).

In terms of drawing on an inductive analysis method, it is arguable that there are other types of inductive analysis methods which could be used as an alternative to thematic analysis, such as grounded theory, phenomenology and semiotic analysis. Employing grounded theory could be an option as it is a type of inductive thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2013). However, I found the use of grounded theory inappropriate in this thesis.
Charmaz (2006, p. 2) describes grounded theory as:

“A set of methods that consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves.”

I argue that it is necessary to focus on two terms: ‘systematic’ and ‘theories’. The systematic process entails reviewing units of text (often line-by-line, but units can be words, paragraphs, or larger units of text) as they are collected in order to create emergent codes for those units (Guest et al., 2013). The codes are then created and revised through the exhaustive and systematic comparisons, and it finally constructs a theoretical model which is the main feature of grounded theory (Guest et al., 2013). However, thematic analysis has a different goal from grounded theory so the processes are slightly different as well. Guest et al. (2012, p. 15-16) explain the characteristic of thematic analysis arguing that:

“...but in the end, its primary concern is with presenting the stories and experiences voiced by study participants as accurately and comprehensively as possible.”

In other words the aim of thematic analysis is to offer the stories of study participants rather than developing a theoretical model. As I put a particular emphasis on understanding and delivering the stories about the participants’ social world, thematic analysis was employed for the data analysis method in this thesis.

A phenomenological approach may find thematic analysis problematic as it fails to consider the individual in the context. Phenomenology focuses on idiosyncratic meaning to individuals in lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Even though this thesis covers individual experiences, beliefs and perceptions, drawing out shared meanings, practices and beliefs within a participant group through social and cultural processes is the major aspect to be researched. Thus phenomenology was not considered appropriate.
In terms of dealing with meanings, using semiotic analysis could be considered to be another option. Semiotic analysis is about determining how the meanings of signs and symbols are constructed in relation to other things (Manning, 1987). Berger (2004, p. 34) offers an example which clearly explains the characteristic of semiotic analysis; “it may be compared to judging a mean by the quality of the ingredients, without any concern for how the food was cooked or what it tasted like.” What it implies is that semiotic analysis is much more about the interpretation of signs and symbols but it ignores the harmony or comprehensive understanding of the whole context. In this vein semiotic analysis is not valid for the purpose of this thesis which is to understand the participants’ story line regarding their social world.

The processes of data analysis were conducted taking guidance from Basit’s (2003) and Easterby-Smith et al.’s (2002) study of thematic analysis. First of all, I read and re-read the transcripts and field notes to familiarise myself with the data. I broadly sought to identify potential themes and concepts based on the aim of this thesis. As Arthur (2006, p. 145) argues, “the whole set of collected data was each assigned equal weight and initially coded in their entirety using open coding.” Selective coding was then used to synthesise and relate data to conceptual topics of interest and other major categories that emerged from the data interpretation and literature review. This process ensured the researcher’s familiarity with the data thus facilitating the derivation of meaning (Pettigrew, 2002). I iteratively developed patterned regularities in the data including a thick description of each theme. The process was like making a jigsaw puzzle adding pieces to the emerging themes and rearranging pieces to accommodate the additions (Riemer, 2012). Thematic analysis and generating theory were combined with its analytical element (Braun and Clarke 2006; Crawford et al., 2008). This is particularly appropriate when the researcher aims to examine and discover common themes and thoughts from more than one participant. It is beneficial to allocate a narrative to the diverse data to gain a clear logical understanding of the participants’ thoughts and to convey their experience (Crawford et al., 2008). Finally, I created a set of rich, detailed and complex interpretations of the concepts regarding the research questions by making inferences from the data and relying on the relevant literature as a guide (Creswell, 1998).
The overall analysis was done manually rather than using a series of computer packages (e.g. NVivo). Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) allows researchers to deal with a large sets of interviews than manual analyses can, and to look at patterns of codes, links between codes and co-occurrences in a highly systematic fashion since retrieval of data grouped by codes is made far easier (Joffe and Yardley, 2012). Even though CAQDAS provides an efficient and systematic function, it is still a matter of debate amongst qualitative researchers because it could be seen to conflict with “the epistemological and ontological axioms underpinning the chosen research approach” (Morison and Moir, 1998, p. 115). Moreover, Choi (2008) argues in her comparative study of the traditional analysis method and NVivo2 that as the traditional form of data analysis focused on investigating meanings without the process of coding, the researcher could closely attach to the collected data. Because using software makes the researcher focus on functional aspects such as developing codes and systems, the initial purpose to find and understand meanings could be ruined (Lee and Fielding, 1995). The use of computer software in qualitative data analysis is also a controversial issue in Korea due to the issue of appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness (Choi, 2008; Kim and Kim, 2008). In particular the linguistic characteristics should be considered significant when using the software. In this thesis, the data were collected, transcribed and analysed in South Korean. This is because it is necessary to keep the data in an original language until the very final stage of the research in order to maintain the original quality and nuances. According to Rivas (2012, p. 372), “language is rich and evolving, and words may be used in unconventional ways; for example, ‘shooting up’ is a term for injecting drugs used by drug addicts as explored in a study by Howard Becker (1963); ‘Bull and Cow’ is a London Cockney rhyming slang for ‘row’ or argument: ‘wicked’ has a meaning either bad or good depending on your age: ‘peng’ is a current youth talk for attractive.” Likewise keeping an original language of the collected data played a significant role in this thesis in terms of catching and understanding meanings and even subtle nuances in which the participants construct and believe. Among various types of analysis software, only two of them: NUDIST and NVivo can read Korean. In 2006 a new version of NVivo has been developed by merging with NUDIST (Kim and Kim, 2008) so NVivo could be the only possible option to analyse the data in Korean. However I considered NVivo inappropriate
particularly to use in Korean data and there are very few studies using CAQDAS in Korea as well (KOSSDA, 2010). There is an attempt to develop qualitative data analysis software suitable for Korean called ‘Bluebird Version 1.0’ which is still in progress (Kim and Kim, 2008). It also implies that the existing software have some limitations to use in Korean data. The more in-depth reasons behind this argument can be supported by discussing the linguistic and cultural characteristics in Korean.

Lee et al. (2012) investigate linguistic and cultural differences between Korean and English arguing that Korean (language) has its unique characteristics. First of all, Korean involves a lot of ambiguous expressions compared to English which has manifest expressions with straight-arrow type structure in its language. They argue that this is because Korea is a racially homogeneous nation involving a single culture and a single language but western countries are multiracial and multicultural nations. Secondly, Korean has its own expressive ways such as multiple inflection, diverse collocations, various metaphors, the mixture with Chinese language and pidginization which is a disorderly mixed phenomenon between English and Korean (Lee et al., 2012). I argue that this kind of linguistic feature cannot be fully considered by the computer software. These unique features in Korean imply that the researcher has to be fully familiar with Korean culture and language in order to deal with the data in Korean. In other words the researcher has to get directly involved in the data analysis and interpretation as the central analytic task of textual analysis to decode the meaning of the text cannot be fulfilled by CAQDAS (Joffe and Yardley, 2012).

This thesis didn’t involve particular visual methods. There are some visual methods used in qualitative research such as photo elicitation or photographic analysis (Hesford and Brueggemann, 2006). Photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview as an interview stimuli, evoking information, feelings, and memories that are due to the photograph’s particular form of representations (Wagner, 1978; Harper, 2002). According to Hesford and Brueggemann (2006), photographic analysis involves examining the image(s) in terms of subject/content (the components of the image), audience/content (the historical and cultural contexts of the image), and perspective (the photographer’s view) all part of a
so-called rhetorical triangle. Even though these visual methods are useful in qualitative research, this thesis didn’t intend to investigate, evaluate or pictorialise the visual data. This is because an attempt to make a close examination of the visual data was not considered important in this thesis. The major purpose of using visual materials in this thesis was to support the verbal explanations through visualised forms. In particular collecting visual contents during the fieldwork was an observational tool and the collected contents were employed in order to bring the field to the thesis. In other words, this thesis puts emphasis on understanding the context through visual materials rather than understanding about visual materials. Just as Goulding and Saren (2009) display some photos of the participants in order to visually show the Gothic subculture, this thesis used the collected visual contents as supportive evidence rather than employed a particular visual analysis method.

3.8 Ethical issues

Methodology and methods cannot be separated for a need to explain the steps taken to treat the research participants with care, sensitivity and respect for their status as human beings (Oliver, 2004). In other words the issues raised by the research ethics have to be considered significant as it ensures that respondents were treated fairly and equitably, and were informed about all aspects of the research which were relevant to them (Oliver, 2004). This thesis involved several ethical issues: informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, interview ethics, and data ownership. According to Lichtman (2013, p. 55), “individuals participating in a research study have a reasonable expectation that they will be informed of the nature of the study and may choose whether or not to participate.” I made two types of consent forms based on the University of Leicester ethics review guidelines and they were both written in South Korean: one for the observation and another one for the interview (see Appendix 4). I particularly put the logo of the School of Management University of Leicester on the top of the consent forms as it verified my status as a PhD student. Both consent forms included the basic information about me as a researcher and an explanation about the overall thesis including the employed methods. More importantly, I attached a separate signature form for each participant so they didn’t know each other’s opinion. This is because if a
research is conducted within an organisation or a group, individuals within that group may find it hard to refuse to join even though they do not want to be involved. This could have happened in the South Korean context as South Korea is extensively based on the relational and group culture. Moreover, the issue of anonymity and confidentiality was mentioned, particularly emphasising the issue of taking photographs and videos. The consent forms showed that all the collected data would only be used under the academic purposes. As the participants voluntarily took photos or videos of their activities in order to upload them on their websites or blogs, nobody seemed to feel repulsion. In order to protect the identities of participants in the photographs, the participants’ faces in the photographs were dimmed. Moreover, all the names of the participants were changed into pseudonyms. Even though Korean names are hardly traceable due to the compositional characteristic of name in relation to the linguistic feature of Korean, I chose to use pseudonyms in order to follow a moral obligation in terms of protecting participants’ identities (Orb et al., 2000). I also considered using numbers or symbols for instance ‘participant 1’ because names could involve stereotypical or particular images/characteristics and this may influence on the interpretation of participants’ quotes. However, as using numbers or symbols could make the researcher distant from the context, the use of pseudonyms was employed but necessarily in Korean names. Even though the name of each participant was changed, the group name, the BORA was kept in an original form. Basically the participants agreed to be researched with the exposure of their group name. Moreover they put emphasis on the group name which involved particular meanings, ethos and identities. In this sense I found that there was no rationale for keeping the group name anonymous.

Regarding the interview ethics, the concepts of relationships and power between researchers and participants cannot be ignored (Orb et al., 2000). The most important reason to conduct interviews was to listen to the participants’ experiences and stories through their voices. Therefore, my role as a researcher was to draw out a participant’s willingness to share his or her experience. As the interviews were mostly conducted after the participant observation, I and the participants built a close relationship with each other and this was helpful to do interviews. Moreover, as this thesis didn’t involve any painful, dangerous or traumatic experiences or stories, the participants had no
burden to share their stories during interviews. Moreover, in order to find and resolve any problems during the fieldwork, I submitted a sample of the interview transcripts which was translated into English to my supervisors and we had an interim online meeting to discuss it. While interviewing, I referred to an actual guidance of conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews in qualitative research (e.g. Kvale, 1996; Boyce and Neale, 2006; Turner, 2010). In particular, the way to minimise intrusiveness was emphasised regarding the interview techniques as it was important that the researcher should let the interviewees to open up and talk as much as they can (Lichtman, 2013). I was attuned and responsive to what the interviewees were saying and doing. I also focused on the interviewees’ body language because it indicated that the interviewees were becoming uneasy or anxious about particular questions.

Regarding varying degrees of the collected data approval by research participants, Jones (2013) argues that there is debate about what research materials should be shared with participants. In other words it is questionable whether participants should be allowed to offer commentaries on interview transcripts or analyses of findings. There are different views on what extent to which this sharing and input should be made explicit in research (Jones, 2013). In this thesis, I didn’t allow the participants to read and examine the collected data. This is because I as a researcher was the only person who experienced all stages of this ethnographic research process - ‘getting in’, ‘getting on’ and ‘getting out’ (Buchanan et al., 1988). As I mentioned before, the overall research from the way of setting the research questions to the way of finding the answers was developed based on my own preferences, beliefs, values and interactions with others. Moreover, I as an outsider of the participant group could avoid having the taken-for-granted rules of interaction in their everyday life. In this vein my view and interpretation takes the most significant role to produce a detailed description of how this particular social group operates.

All the participants agreed with the researcher’s data ownership for the further publications. All of them also wanted to gain access to the completed thesis even though it would be written in English.
3.9 Methodological implications in the Korean context

As discussed before, ethical issues are complex and cannot always easily be resolved. Oliver (2004, p. 136) argues that, “although a consideration of the classical theories of ethics and of the writings of well-known moral philosophers do help in identifying and resolving ethical issues, such theories tend to provide only general guidance rather than absolute answers.” Moreover, as each piece of research involves different ethical dilemmas, what is considered to be ethical issues is another question to be investigated. In line with this, I found the importance of some methodological implications which could be considered as other branches of ethics. In particular I put emphasis on considering the social and cultural aspects when conducting participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews in Korea.

First of all, the choice of the interview place was an issue to be considered. According to Elwood and Martin (2000, p. 653), “at the most basic level, interview locations provide an important opportunity for researchers to make observations that generate richer and more detailed information than can be gleaned from the interview content alone.” When I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, each interviewee had to choose the place where an interview might be carried out based on their expression of convenience. Every interviewee made an explicit suggestion as to an appropriate location for the interview, which was to be in a public place, for example, a cafe. Morton-Williams (1985) and Berik (1996) allude to the importance of considering relationships and interactions in particular places - noting that participants might feel uncomfortable speaking freely about some issues in places where other people are present and might overhear the conversation. Following Morton-Williams’s (1985) argument, I expected to have interviews at the participants’ private places such as their houses. However, all participants preferred having interviews in public places. I found a reason of this phenomenon from the socio-cultural characteristics of South Korea. This could be further explained based on what Lee et al. (2012) found; there are fundamental differences in the necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter between Western cultural areas and Korea. In particular a view towards clothing and shelter is closely connected to the issue of interview places. In terms of clothing, westerners wear shoes...
the whole day. When they leave their houses in the morning, they fasten their shoe laces and do not untie them until they go to bed. What it means is that they wear shoes at home. On the other hand, Koreans immediately take off their shoes when they get into their houses. Lee et al. (2012) find the reason of this phenomenon from the historical and cultural backgrounds. They argue that the western culture is connected to livestock farming and moving culture so they always have to be ready to leave. However, Korean culture is closely related to agriculture and settlement culture. Moreover, houses in western countries do not have fences but have an open yard. It means that even outsiders find it relatively easy to visit someone’s house. This can also be supported by westerners’ home party culture. However, houses in eastern countries are usually surrounded by high fences and have a great gate. Interestingly, the inside structure of the houses is opposite from each other. Each western home has an individual room, living room, kitchen, etc. which has its own door. Thus, an individual room is the most private and unsociable place. However, each place in the traditional Korean houses is relatively open to other family members because of the collectivism in eastern culture. What it implies is that Koreans consider their own houses quite private so they are cautious to invite outsiders or unfamiliar people to their own places. In this vein it is understandable that some may avoid having interviews at interviewees’ houses in Korea. This indicated that the views toward particular places were an interesting topic to be considered. The notion of place and space became a part of my developing data analysis (see details in section 4.5.4).

Second of all, linguistic characteristics made influences on conducting interviews. According to Lee et al. (2012), Korean involves ambiguous expressions which do not have articulate meanings but have rather abstract understandings. Korea is a single nation with a single culture and a single language. Thus, Koreans can communicate with each other without manifest expressions as they know the meanings of their words right away by mental telepathy. On the other hand, western countries are multiracial and multicultural places so delivering manifest and articulate expressions in their conversations are needed. It implies that conducting interviews in Korea requires the researcher to have an ability to grasp and understand the meaning from the context. That is, the researcher has to be fully familiar with Korean culture and language when
the aim of research is to understand both extent and latent meanings from interviews.

3.10 Limitations

Even though it is intended to make a small but solid contribution to the field, this thesis is not without limitations caused by a number of factors. First, as the empirical study was conducted in Seoul which is the capital city of South Korea, the geographical characteristics played an important role in this thesis. Seoul is the largest metropolis in the whole of South Korea, and thus it is socio-culturally more modernised compared with other provinces in South Korea. Seoulites obviously have more opportunities to encounter ethical consumption in various ways in comparison with those who live in other provinces. For instance, the majority of stores which conduct ethical campaigns, selling ethically produced goods are located in Seoul. This explains the reason why Seoul is chosen for this study. At the same time this may lead to the assumption that Seoulites may have a different perception of ethical consumption from those in other provinces. Thus it may be hard to draw a generalisation from the outcomes of this research, it seems necessary to consider the influence of the geographical distinctiveness when interpreting and understanding the research outcomes.

Second, a consideration of the current period is of great importance. In 2011 the new mayor of Seoul developed and conducted various policies in relation to social firms and ethical consumption (see details in section 3.4). As a result, Seoul became the first Fair Trade city in 2012 (Lee, 2012). This proclamation has offered various opportunities of experiencing ethical consumption to the residents of Seoul. As this revolutionary attempt has been made for the last three years, Seoul now experiences the initial stage of ethical consumption. Then it is assumed that the views toward ethical consumption in South Korea may be yet immature and not fully-fledged compared with the views from other countries like the UK. Since 1980s the field of ethical consumption has prospered and has settled down in the UK (Ethical Consumer, 2014). Therefore the phases of the time should not be ignored in this thesis.
3.11 Summary

This chapter has discussed the methodology employed for this thesis with a discussion of my philosophical assumptions: ontological and epistemological stance. I have explained how this thesis assumes the reality and knowledge which underpin my research approach that is the interpretative paradigm. This is also reflected in the choice of methods; participant observation and semi-structured interviews that are in line with an ethnographic approach. The sampling process was then discussed, justifying how a particular ethical consumer group in South Korea was chosen. A detailed discussion of the process of data collection such as the experiences of fieldwork and interviews was also made in this chapter. Following this, the process of data analysis was explained, offering a justification regarding the use of manual thematic analysis method. Finally, I have discussed the ethics and methodological implications of this thesis, particularly considering the characteristics of the South Korean context.

This chapter has demonstrated ‘how’ I collected the data. The following chapter will present ‘what’ I collected, namely the empirical findings of this thesis. It will start with a detailed explanation about the participant group in order to help the reader understand the organisational dynamics of the group.
Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Organisational dynamic: The BORA group

4.1.1 Introduction

Every organisation builds its own world based on shared philosophy, values, attitudes, beliefs, customs and written/unwritten rules, etc. This is connected with the notion of ‘organisational culture’ which Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 6) define as, “the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another.” In other words, members of a group have factors in common and by which they distinguish themselves from other groups. As most organisations have clear objectives, for instance, companies set a goal to maximise profits in their businesses, most activities within organisations are aimed at achieving such objectives. In this sense, before investigating the BORA’s activities, it is significant to understand the organisational dynamics of the BORA. In particular this section starts with investigating the history of the BORA which shows how the BORA was established. And then the characteristics of the BORA are explored that reveal the distinctiveness of the group. The BORA pursues two traits: a non-hierarchical structure and the process-focused characteristics which influence the construction of the group. Moreover, the BORA members are like-minded with each other in terms of pursuing similar political beliefs. Even though the BORA members are not involved in any other political organisations, they show their own thoughts and ethos toward politics in South Korea. Finally, the common interest of the BORA is investigated as it shows how the BORA members get together and make a distinction from others.

4.1.2 The origins of the BORA

The BORA is a voluntary organisation established in 2010 by ‘the SEEDS’, a non-profit organisation in Seoul, South Korea. The parent firm focuses mainly on cultivating young social entrepreneurs, creating a sustainable and innovative model of social enterprises and producing the civil platforms of the sustainable environments for
them (the SEEDS, 2013). While carrying out business, the SEEDS came up with a long-term project which was in additional to their main businesses the BORA was initiated. As the main business of the SEEDS was to support social enterprises and ethical producers, they had an interest in ethical consumption as an additional area to be involved in:

“We believe that in the capitalistic system, consumers can be the most powerful subject which can draw out any positive changes from producers who cause various social issues such as labour, management, environment, and regional imbalance, etc. In South Korea, there are consumer movements covering various topics such as Fair Trade, co-operative, local token money, etc. but most people do not actually feel close to the influence of ethical consumption. By enlarging the notion of ethical consumption, it is necessary to bring forth the enlargement of social markets, the development of the alternative producers and the changes of the existing production systems. From this, a new type of production and consumption has to be further developed as well” (the SEEDS, 2013).

The SEEDS argues that even though consumers have an interest in the social issues, they seldom attempt to have actual experiences that can enhance any problematic or controversial situations, especially in relation to ethical consumption. Thus in order to enhance the role of consumers in the field of ethical consumption, the SEEDS launched the BORA as a platform to encourage people to experience ethical consumption. This is not just for the BORA members but also for the wider population through public activities. The SEEDS particularly focuses on the younger generation who it perceives to be creative, active and adventurous to lead the BORA, and this view is reflected on the foundation of the BORA:

“As the problem of unemployment has become a global issue, South Korea also suffers from a variety of social problems caused by the unemployment of young people. Under this circumstance, various governmental and managerial sectors try to enlarge alternative opportunities such as social company entrepreneurship, consumer activists or alternative producers by stimulating the youth's creative,
active and voluntary contribution. In terms of making the youth acknowledge the social issues, especially the consumption-related issues which are closely connected to their lives, the notion of ethical consumption is suitably relevant to the youth” (The BORA, 2012).

The BORA targets those aged in order to stimulate their creative, active and voluntary contribution in their daily life as a consumer. Young people are important because they extensively take part in consumption activities in their everyday life. They are often taking responsibility for areas of consumption for the first-time (e.g. buying groceries, clothes or even accommodation). Young people have the characteristics of being creative, active and passionate and hope these will make an influence on their consumption activities. In this sense, the SEEDS understood that the youth could lead the role of ethical consumption activities under the name of the BORA. In particular, the SEEDS wanted to run the BORA in a creative and easy way because they plan to make both the participants and non-participants enjoy by allowing them to experience ethical consumption. An interview with Dae-Hun Kim, who is a member of the SEEDS and who is responsible at the development of the BORA, shows the vision and aim of the BORA:

“Actually staging a campaign is not motivated by the desire for making profits, but by the sense of social responsibility. In this vein, running the BORA is motivated by a kind of social responsibility of building a civil platform. At the same time, the main aim is to make a civil movement group based on an ecosystem by which social enterprises can be invested and nurtured. Thus, we (the SEEDS) do not expect to have instant outcomes, but the ultimate goal is what I’ve mentioned. That is why we (the SEEDS) want to run the BORA.” (Dae-Hun Kim)

The BORA has an ultimate goal to cultivate social enterprises and foster socially responsible environments in the society. Running the BORA may not directly make an influence on the businesses of the SEEDS but in an ultimate sense the SEEDS has sought to establish a platform which is potentially helpful not only to them but also to the society. The representative of the SEEDS made a speech in which she further
showed the vision of the company and the foundational value of the BORA. As the speech was made during the first meeting of a new group of the BORA, it included some previous experiences from the initial stage of the BORA to the current stage. The issue of how the BORA made and managed groups is also explained:

“You may not know about the SEEDS I guess. The SEEDS is a 2-year old organisation which was made by people who worked in social enterprises and cooperatives. (...) Let me give you a quiz. What is the easiest exercise? (Somebody answered “breathing..?”) Yes. You got an answer! I think the BORA activities have to be like breathing. As you may notice, ethical consumption is closely connected to our daily lives. For our health, breathing is the fundamental exercise but there are various types of breathing such as hypogastric breathing or brain breathing, etc. We can actually think, try and conduct various breathing exercises in our daily lives and then we can recommend them to others. As we can spread this kind of exercise smoothly, the BORA’s activities could become part of our lives and spread over the society.” (Eun-A Lee)

The statement clearly shows the BORA’s structure and its vision built with the guidance of the SEEDS. First of all, an emphasis is made on the aspects people can do in their daily lives. As the phrase ‘like the breathing exercise’ shows, people cannot live without consumption. We all conduct consumption activities in various manners such as buying a bottle of water, making a phone call, purchasing an educational service or recycling a plastic item, etc. In other words, consumption is part of our lives so focusing on mundane consumption is of great importance. Adams and Raisborough (2010) argue that our everyday consumption practices are an opportunity to ‘make a difference’. Likewise, the SEEDS finds an opportunity for ethical consumption activities via mundane consumption. Here, the notion of consumption is not limited to purchasing behaviour but includes the whole process of consumer behaviour, including for example the way the goods are used up. In this sense, the SEEDS argues that consumers’ roles are not confined to shopping practices but they can be conceived of much more broadly to include the aspect of production:
“I guess the role of the BORA is to make any changes in our daily lives so that they can bring out the ultimate solution. Before you came to this place ‘Che-Hwa-Dang’, you might have experienced your daily consumption such as taking the underground and buying a cup of coffee. Consumption is the thing that we do the most in our daily lives so there are numerous ways to develop positive effects. Like the breathing exercise, finding the meanings and values of any activities in our lives has of great importance and in this vein the BORA is an important subject. Moreover, while getting involved in the BORA’s activities, you may have an opportunity to think about any good and co-operative producers.” (Eun-A Lee)

Lee argues that the BORA can get directly involved in the activities of both production and consumption. For instance, consumers can produce or create a new value from their consumption practices and the opportunity to do this can be found in the BORA’s activities. What the SEEDS expects from the BORA’s activities is to let the participants become co-producers so that they can learn and understand ethical consumption. Here, co-producing does not necessarily mean the manufacturing of products or services but also means the creation of values:

“Secondly, as you can see, the previous group members who become the senior members actually made the plans for this workshop and other programmes. They voluntarily did all these things and I think this is a quite important point for you to remember. Rather than offering any rules or guidelines, the members should think and make the plans and rules by themselves. (...) The BORA can keep developing and conducting various activities in relation to ethical consumption and from this, we can expect small but solid changes in our society.” (Eun-A Lee)

The SEEDS expects that all the activities are voluntarily and freely conducted by the BORA itself. In other words, in terms of an organisational characteristic of the BORA group, there are no leaders or written rules to follow but all the systems are discussed and managed by the group members. This is very unusual in Korean business or social/leisure groups. If there are some guidelines or structured rules, the BORA members may feel it difficult to open up their ideas and create various activities.
because of the influence of power. In this vein, the SEEDS did not directly get involved in the BORA’s activities so autonomy was encouraged. However, it can be argued that power relations between the BORA and the SEEDS do exist. As numerous researchers and theorists (see Kahn, 1964; Jackson and Carter, 1991) suggest, organisations in general are in an unequal power relationship. Hawley (1963, p. 422) also argues that, “every social act is an exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation, and every social group or system is an organisation of power.” The BORA can be influenced by the SEEDS because the BORA accepts the ethos of the SEEDS as it is a parent firm of the BORA. There was one person who worked at the SEEDS and at the same time, was involved in the BORA as an initial member. Even though his role was limited to a form of secretarial job, doing some administrative works of the BORA such as managing the list of the members or contacting other organisations, etc., some BORA members was curious about his position. My curiosity in his role was sparked when he could make a direct or indirect influence on the BORA’s activities. I noticed that he seemed rather careful to present his opinions during the BORA’s activities. He explained the role of the SEEDS:

“The SEEDS is like an incubating centre. In other words, the SEEDS is a medium which can bridge among necessary organisations. By bridging among various sectors, new projects or activities may be developed and ultimately, it brings a particular ecosystem in the society.” (Dae-Hun Kim)

The role of the SEEDS was limited to the practical issues such as supporting the BORA’s activities rather than getting involved in the core activities such as developing particular types of activities. For instance, when the BORA planned to conduct a particular type of ethical consumption activity at a particular festival, the SEEDS offered some information about the festivals which the BORA could join. The SEEDS offered some practical benefits to the BORA in order to make them focus on their activities. The SEEDS offered preparation expenses to do the BORA’s activities and let the BORA members use one of their office rooms whenever they have meetings. However, the SEEDS never set any rules for the BORA members to follow when offering these kinds of benefits. As the nature of organisations includes the notion of
power and governance (Feigenbaum, 2014), it is hard to say that the BORA is a completely independent entity but it does not mean that the SEEDS takes an enormous role to manage and control the BORA. When establishing the BORA, the SEEDS didn’t expect to have any practical or visible outcomes from their activities so the SEEDS focused on building a platform for the BORA to learn and practise ethical consumption.

4.1.3 The organisational characteristics of the BORA

Rallapalli et al. (1994) examine the relationships between consumer ethical beliefs and personality traits, arguing that individuals with a high need for social desirability and with a strong problem solving-coping style tend to have more ethical beliefs. Smith (1990, pp. 178-179) also found that the socially responsible consumer is in general “… less dogmatic, less conservative, less status conscious, less alienated and less personality competent.” The BORA members also have some similar characteristics which can be condensed into two traits: a non-hierarchical structure within the group and the process-focused characteristic rather than an outcome-oriented. The following extract from the interview with Sung-Kyung Kim clearly shows these features of the group:

“Whenever having meetings, I don’t think there is a leader or a rule in this group. When I go to other meetings or meet other group members, I always find a leader or a set rule. In the BORA group, there are some leading members who take some responsibilities but they do not make decisions by themselves. Thus, everyone can become a leader in this group and everyone can raise the voice. I really like it. It is quite different from other groups. In some other groups, the schedules are tightly organised and the participants do not have any freedom to suggest their ideas because there are already set programmes. The BORA’s system is not very effective if comparing it with other groups’ systems but at least, we have freedom. And one thing special about the BORA is to meet every Thursday. We do not have any advance plan for the meeting but we meet first and decide what to do (smile).” (Sung-Kyung Kim)
Kim emphasises the importance of processes in how the BORA group is run. Rather than focusing on having certain outcomes, the BORA members put a value on the aspect of getting all members involved in all the processes of their activities. Kim demonstrates that the aspect of having no leaders who have the actual power to control the group makes a distinction from other organisations. Many organisations have bylaws governing their structures, board of director memberships and operations, and even non-profit organisations are often managed by directors (Feigenbaum, 2014). For instance, owners or directors firstly set the programmes or activities, expecting to have the conspicuous outcomes. And then the participants have to follow the leaders’ guidelines so they are just a part of them. Most organisations in Korea have a hierarchical structure. Indeed Bammel (2008) argues that there are no ‘flat’ organisations in Korea. The language even includes the social hierarchy, for instance, “Korean speakers must be aware of and reflect at all times the relative positions of the speakers, listeners and the third persons being spoken about at all times” (Bammel, 2008, p. 1). In this vein, having a relatively flat or horizontal structure within the group is a manifest feature that allows the group members to have autonomy. However as all group members were directly involved in the whole processes of their activities, they understood and admitted that there was lack of efficiency because they spent a lot of time in the process of making decisions. Nevertheless, the BORA members’ actual experiences and learning processes of ethical consumption were significant. This is in line with the BORA’s fundamental belief which is to experience ethical consumption in their daily lives and spread the ethical values to the public by doing and showing their own creations. This ‘BORA’ identity stands in stark contrast to the rest of ethical consumption-related groups or the mainstream marketplace by making its own cultural space. And this fosters opportunities to re-think ethical consumption as seen in Chatzidakis et al.’s (2012) study (see section 2.5.4).

The autonomous and voluntary role of the BORA which remains as one of the main characteristics of the group was reflected not only in their activities regarding ethical consumption but also upon other organisational and managerial aspects. First of all, making a name for the group was one of them. Whenever new members started to join the BORA, the previous members told the story about the name of the BORA because it
showed a kind of history of the BORA. The name of the BORA was created by the first group in 2010. The full name of this group was ‘BORABONO’ which was composed of the term ‘BORA’ and the term ‘PROBONO’: ‘BORA’ was a name of promoting ethical consumerism campaigns and ‘PROBONO’ referred to professional works voluntarily undertaken without payment as a public service (The BORA, 2012). The name of the BORA was a shortened version of the full name because it was relatively easy to remember. The term ‘BORA’ in Korean has several meanings depending on the context and grammar. For example, if ‘BORA’ is used as a noun, it means ‘purple’ (colour). Purple is the combination of red and blue. Red represents an emotional aspect and blue represents a rational aspect. In this vein, purple represents the combination of emotional and rational aspects. If ‘BORA’ is used as a verb, it means ‘look’ in an imperative form.

As the BORA wants to let people pay attention to their activities and the group itself, the name ‘BORA’ is finally selected among other options such as ‘Spread’, ‘Fair people’, ‘Fair’, ‘Fair movement’, ‘Happy buy-rus’, ‘Happy buy’, ‘Goodsumer: consumer + good’, ‘Sosumer: social + consumer’ and ‘ECM: ethical consumer movement’ (The BORA, 2012: Uploaded 27/01/12).

Secondly, the BORA developed its own replenishment system that involved recruiting members to a new group every six months. Each group had a life span of approximately six months. Setting a kind of time period made each group intensively focus on the activities they conducted and this aspect could offset the weakness of the group: inefficiency. Moreover, as a new group was constructed in every six months, existing members could listen to some new ideas from the newly recruited members. This was because the new members were outsiders in the field of ethical consumption so they had different perspectives toward ethical consumption the existing members might not have considered.

The existing members were responsible for recruiting new members. In advance of the recruitment process, existing members who could be considered core and senior members met to discuss possible ways of recruiting new members. The BORA didn’t have any written rules or regulations to follow so they made all decisions on any activity through the discussion within the group. Even though the BORA didn’t have
any rules or regulations, the BORA members wanted to be seen as professional and serious in ethical consumption unlike other social clubs. The term ‘recruitment’ is normally used in job interviews, to mean selecting and deselecting a particular type of people based on the pre-set criteria, and it was also used by the BORA. By adopting recruitment the BORA did not in practice accept all people who would like to join but they selected or deselected a particular type of people. However, one of the organisational characteristics of the BORA was that they didn’t set any detailed criteria for qualifications for becoming a BORA member. It seems contradictory but what they intended was to identify the type of people who should not be recruited rather than to remain as an exclusive and selective group.

While discussing some experiences of previous groups, they came up with some difficulties they had before and they did not want to repeat. Most members noted that there were some previous members who applied for the BORA and joined the group with various purposes. People joined a particular group for a myriad of reasons such as socialising, problem-solving, building a career, etc. Moreover all these reasons could co-exist, for instance I would like to join the BORA because I am interested in ethical consumption and at the same time, I would like to meet some people who could share the similar thoughts with me. However it was obvious that only people who had a ‘real’ interest in ethical consumption spent time thinking about ethical consumption by voluntarily and continually participating in the group activities. Here, the meaning of ‘real’ interest was hard to define and it could not be used as a set of personal criteria for potential members because this approach was too prescriptive, seeming to jar against the norms of the BORA where hierarchical structure and governance was actively avoided. They did not want to set detailed criteria for qualification. Instead, the BORA members commonly focused on the aspect of having ‘not real’ reasons - certain attitudes and behaviours - that new members should not exhibit. That included those who didn’t prioritise an interest in ethical consumption as they did not actively participate in the group activities. In the beginning, they regularly participated in the group activities and they also kept the essential manner during the collective meetings such as keeping the appointed time. However, whenever they were busy because of the exams or other appointments, they didn’t participate in the group activities. This was
like the case of Kozinets’s (2002a) description about insincere attendees of a particular event that was, attendees at the Burning Man festival who only stayed for a couple of days and viewed the festival as a party rather than a celebration of freedom from corporate influence. From some of the experiences from the previous group activities, the BORA group members drew upon several problematic issues such as a lack of commitment to the group, or the participation of the group for strategic reasons that did not prioritise ethical consumption. Dae-Hun Kim noted that:

“Initially we recruited about 50 people for a group but approximately 25 people came late at the first meeting. After that, only 20 people came to the second meeting and the number of people kept changing as time went. This kind of phenomenon actually made a negative influence on the whole group. When people applied for a group, they were quite enthusiastic but they didn’t abide by their schedules. They were not serious in the participation of the group activities.” (Dae-Hun Kim)

A frequent change in the number of the BORA members was quite problematic because if a member irregularly joined the activity, other members should explain what they did so far. There was lack of continuity in work. This kind of situation was similar to a phenomenon when a few students who are uncooperative can spoil the whole class in some ways. I also felt the same way during the fieldwork. I had to receive each participant’s signature on the consent form whenever I conducted the participant observations. I could check attendances of the group members. I clearly noticed that there were 3 to 5 members who irregularly joined the BORA activities or left in the middle of the activities. Other members also seemed to take for granted a few particular members who irregularly joined. Thus, when they planned an activity and distributed a role for each member, they presumed their absence in the future. Then some important roles in activities were relatively undertaken by the core members or the members who regularly participated in. What I inferred was that there were invisible layers within the group which could potentially build a hierarchical structure in terms of the degree of commitment to the group. Those members who actively and regularly joined the activities might lead the BORA or take the leading roles such as decision making. Then,
this came into conflict with the BORA’s pursuit of not having the hierarchical structure within the group.

In order to minimise irregular support patterns, the BORA members try to avoid selecting people who do not put interest in ethical consumption prior to any other purposes. This does not mean that they seek people based on a particular criteria or qualification, for example, those who are known in this field or people who have various experiences. They try to deselect people who put a particular emphasis on other purposes that are not related to ethical consumption such as socialising or gaining an experience for their future careers. We can see parallels here with Widdicombe and Wooffitt’s (1990) idea about ‘being versus doing’. Members who have temporary fashion-related motives with inauthenticity are seen as ‘doing’ and members who imbue the values as a lifestyle and earn their status over time by paying their dues are engaged in ‘being’. The significance of authenticity and group membership was discussed in section 2.5 and will be examined in detail in section 4.5. The process of making an application form for new members shows the outcome of the core members’ concern and discussion:

“Now I think that we need to consider the applicant’s real purpose to apply for the BORA. We may test them in order to check this aspect. (...) We may need to know about their personality as well. Can you think of any questions we can ask?” (Kyu-Jung Kim)

From Kim’s statement, the BORA resembles an exclusive and selective group. The BORA tries to ‘test’ applicants in order to figure out their ‘real’ purpose to apply for the BORA. Not all applicants are welcome and only people who satisfy what is deemed to have a ‘real’ purpose will be accepted as the group members. The aspect of considering personality and attitude also implies that the BORA members looked for like-minded people. The BORA does not focus on finding people who exactly meet a certain set of criteria, but at least, the BORA seems to have a kind of expectation to new members such as having the similar mind-set.
“When we firstly read the submitted application forms before the recruiting interview (meeting), we may get some feelings if the applicants are really interested in the field of ethical consumption. Thus why don’t we make the application form a bit complicated? If the form is complex that requires the applicant to spend time and effort to fill out, the person who really wants to join the BORA may finish the form. After that, we can meet and talk with the person who sincerely fills out the form.” (Kyu-Jung Kim)

“And we may ask some questions which require a certain level of knowledge about ethical consumption. Even though the applicants do not know the answer, they may present their ideas or thoughts. In other words, we intend to make some questions which seem like testing their level of knowledge. From the way of answering these types of questions, we may see if the applicants put an effort on thinking about the issue of ethical consumption.” (Dae-Hun Kim)

The core members sought to intentionally make the recruiting process difficult for applicants. The selection process was rigorous, and the BORA didn’t want to be seen as a kind of club or social group such as film clubs or dance clubs in which everybody could freely join or not. It didn’t mean that they wanted to select a particular type of people but what they wanted was to find people who were eager to continually take part in ethical consumption activities like the core members. The final form had several questions, which were:

1. Introduce yourself.
2. State any experiences such as volunteer, campaigns, travelling, etc. that are considered to be important for you.
3. State any confident skills for instance using SNS, making blogs, etc.
4. Explain the reason why you want to become a member of the BORA.
5. Follow the link, see two pictures and state any differences between them.
6. Choose one that is weird and state the reason:
   1) Toms shoes are the representative product of Fair Trade.
   2) Eco-bag is much more eco-friendly compared with plastic bags.
3) Buying clothes from SPA brands is unethical.

7. State any ideas about ethical consumption.

The answers to these questions required a certain level of knowledge about ethical consumption. Question 6, for example, required knowledge of a well-known ethical brand and its business. Some might have no idea what Toms shoes are. By putting a particular ethical brand name or some tricky questions, the applicants might feel confused. However this was not an instant test to check one’s level of knowledge because any applicants could complete the form by searching for the answers on the Internet. In other words, the completion of the application form required the applicants to put in time and effort on thinking about the issue of ethical consumption. If they were willing to make an effort this was taken to indicate a willingness to engage and do activities, and be a potentially valued the BORA members. Whether or not the applicants knew about ethical consumption was not an important issue for the BORA, but they wanted to see and find people who had at least thought about ethical consumption. The aspect of having their own thoughts was very important because all the activities within the BORA were created and conducted by the group members themselves.

Dae-Hun Kim who was the member of the BORA (and the gatekeeper of this fieldwork) talked about this issue during the recruiting interview. After receiving the completed application forms, the BORA arranged the time and the place to have the recruiting interview which could be considered as the second stage of the recruiting system. The interview was conducted at the SEEDS office. It was called an interview but in practice it was more like a focus group meeting which allowed the BORA members and the applicants to get to know each other. The BORA members wanted to meet and talk with the applicants in person because the information in the application form was not enough to know them. They gathered and freely talked about themselves first. After that, each applicant talked about their opinions about ethical consumption and also about the expected scenarios of the BORA such as any expected types of activities. The core and senior members also briefly talked about their experiences of the BORA’s activities they had. Finally, they had a question and answer session, and
Dae-Hun Kim briefly explained how the recruiting system was developed and conducted to the potential members. His explanation included the reason why the BORA wanted to select a limited number of people for the new group:

“Some people use the term ‘pick out’ from this recruiting interview but we don’t want to focus on the term because it emphasises that somebody will not be picked out for the group. In the past, the BORA recruited a lot of people without considering the number of people. However, we found that recruiting too many people could make the whole group worse in terms of conducting activities. Thus, we would like to recruit a small number of people that is around 20. We want to select people who can regularly participate in all of the BORA activities. We want to emphasise that people who are not confident to join all the BORA activities are not qualified for the BORA member...” (Dae-Hun Kim)

The qualification to become a BORA member was entirely based on one’s real interest in ethical consumption. It was questionable for me if the BORA could find people who had a real interest in ethical consumption from the answers to the questions in the application form. It seemed that the BORA was seeking to gain new members with whom they could ‘act with’ rather than ‘act upon’. This also revealed that the BORA did not have a ‘missionary’ aim, in the sense of telling and preaching to new members or potential members about their views on ethical consumption. It highlighted that the BORA wanted to co-produce, to find common ways and/or new ways of viewing and performing ethical consumption, and that the desire was for this to be produced together. It also emphasised that there should be an ethos, i.e. a set of ideals and activities, evolving constantly. This did not seem to raise a number of tensions with the stated aims of the BORA and the ideals that the BORA believed and continually restated verbally. The BORA could be viewed in some respects as an exclusive and selective group, but in other respects as a voluntary and inclusive group.

Twenty people were recruited as new members and they formed a new group that was Group 4. From the interviews during the fieldwork, the majority of new members clearly remembered the recruiting processes and the application form very well. For
example, Sung-Kyung Kim told the BORA how she recognised that the group was looking for commitment rather than a superficial membership:

“I guess the BORA tried to find people who could enjoy ethical consumption. I mean the BORA wanted to find people who could feel happy when participating in their activities. You know the application form was quite complicated so I don’t think that people who didn’t really want to join the group would complete the form. Moreover, it was interesting that the types of questions were quite different from what other groups focused on. By and large, some groups try to recruit people who already have various experiences as they can adapt to their set programmes. In this vein, the applicants spontaneously focus on the way of presenting their experiences and talents. However, the BORA was quite different in some ways. I think that the BORA didn’t have an interest in the applicants’ level of knowledge or abilities because the application form required me to state my opinion regarding ethical consumption.” (Sung-Kyung Kim)

Kim demonstrated the work that was involved in completing the application, which required some self-reflection including whether the BORA was the right group for her and whether she could provide the commitment which she saw the group needed. Another member also talked about the application form:

“When I saw the application form, I just started to write the answers. I didn’t find questions hard to solve. Actually I already learned some issues of ethical consumption when I worked as the Fair Trade civil ambassador. To become an ambassador, I had to take some training courses and during that period, I learned ethical consumption a lot. However, I felt quite annoyed as there were too many questions. They were troublesome... At the same time, I noticed that the questions were well worth thinking of... I liked the questions and I thought that people who were not very interested in ethical consumption might not be able to complete the form.” (Joo-Sun Bae)

Bae who had a certain level of knowledge about ethical consumption claimed that the
questions were not difficult to answer. The questions were not too tricky or complex for her because she was quite conversant with this field. Bae also recognised that the group tried to find a particular type of people who were ‘very’ interested in ethical consumption:

“While filling out the application form, I spent quite a lot of time searching the information about ethical consumption. I tried to read some examples or diaries uploaded on the BORA blog. For me, the questions were tricky. It offered me an opportunity to study about ethical consumption and to think the relevant issues. Moreover, I didn’t know the term ‘SPA’ brands… you know there was a question about ‘SPA’ brands… I knew about eco-bags… I could gain a lot of knowledge in this field. You know… as the application form made the applicants think about the questions again and again to answer, the BORA attempted to use this form as a helpful tool to distinguish people who had an interest in ethical consumption from those who had not.” (Yoo-Joo Won)

Won, who was not confident in her understanding of ethical consumption, saw the application form itself as an effective means of learning about ethical consumption. Compared with Bae who was knowledgeable in this field, Won felt the application form was difficult to complete but she spent time and effort completing the form. As Won was selected as a new member it seemed that she was the person the BORA was looking for. And this justified that the BORA’s intended processes of recruiting new members worked well. Moreover, like other members Won also recognised that the BORA tried to use the application form as a tool to select people who had an interest in ethical consumption.

They recognised why the BORA had the application system like that and this was likely to have cemented a commitment to the BORA. This is evidenced in that few of the new recruits left the BORA after a few meetings or participations in some activities. Reflections on the interviews with new members also showed that they recognised the recruiting system was quite unique, making the BORA stand out and seem different from other groups which they could have joined. Some members stated that while
applying for the BORA they also considered applying for other ethical consumption related groups. However, they chose to join the BORA because they didn’t like the regulations or rules which other groups had. Sung-Kyung Kim said that the application system actually showed the organisational characteristics of the group:

“I’ve heard from my friend that I guess… Hyundai or Ssangyong (two famous global conglomerates in Korea) run a kind of campaign groups… They did some kinds of ethical consumption activities or other events related to the social issues. Most of the participants in 2-3 months programmes were university students. When my friend went for the recruiting interview, the group told her about the whole schedules of the programmes. In the first week, we do this…and in the second week, we do that… like this... She didn’t have a right to present her ideas or opinions regarding the activities, but the participants just had to follow the schedules. I guess the schedules were very tight. But the BORA had a different system… you know quite loose and slow... but at least, an individual can say something…I really like this… and this is the BORA.” (Sung-Kyung Kim)

The new recruits were secured in their view that the BORA didn’t focus on the aspect of managing and controlling the group in which other organisations put emphasis on. As other organisations set the rules and programmes in advance, the participants had no option but to think and/or suggest their own opinions. In terms of outcomes and performances this way might be helpful and productive because having the pre-set goals and plans meant if the participants just joined then the results would not be produced. Pre-set goals and plans go against what the BORA believe is important, that is, to autonomously think and learn ethical consumption through the actual experiences. That was why the BORA put a value on listening to the applicants’ personal opinions. This approach was different from other organisations.

4.1.4 The political belief of the BORA

The BORA members were bound together by support of a particular political party which could influence the way they saw the social issues. Before discussing the issue of
politics, a brief explanation of politics in Korea is in order. Broadly speaking, politics in Korea is divided into two party lines: one is conservative party (Saenuri Party) and the other is centrist-liberal party (New Politics and Democratic United Party). The Saenuri Party advocates fiscal responsibility, a market-based economy and caution in dealing with North Korea, and the NPDUP supports greater human rights, improved relations with North Korea, and economic policies described as ‘new progressivism’. By and large, Koreans consider the Saenuri Party as a right-wing conservative party and the NPDUP as a leftist liberal party. The characteristics of the dichotomous parties are considerably different from the UK’s political parties for the historical and socio-cultural reasons. As the democratic foundation has been settled in Korea in the late 1980s, Korea has a relatively short history over which to have a free democratic system. For instance, the system of direct election of the president which is one of the manifest features of democracy (Stanford University, 2004) was only launched in 1987. As Korea has experienced the political and economic revolution for a relatively short period, the context of the dichotomous political parties still seems radical, dynamic and sharply conflicted from each other. Dingankar (2010) describes South Korean politics as an image of major scuffles and melee fighting between two camps: that of Conservatives and Progressives. The political voices are relatively strong and firm that make an influence on the construction of each party’s characteristics.

Whenever the participants had conversations about the social or political issues, I could notice that they supported the liberal party (‘the left-wing’). Even though none of them were officially involved in any political organisations, some actively revealed their political views on their accounts on social networks. On 19th December 2012, there was the presidential election in South Korea. The BORA members posted their opinions on their Facebook account or their Twitter account. For example, some members uploaded their own pictures taken in front of a voting venue. These kinds of pictures evidenced that they went to the poll and we must presume actually voted. This production of selfies of people voting was popular in South Korea. Some members who were extensively interested in their political issues posted their opinions about a particular party or criticised other parties by using some sarcastic idioms. For instance, Jung-Eun Cho who supported the left-wing criticised the policies conducted by the right-wing. By
explaining detailed policies raised by the right-wing and criticising them in greater
detail, she justified why people should not support the right-wing:

“The result caused by the wrong choice: This is about the protection of rivers
suggested by Lee and Park. For the last 3 years, the river of life has been
enormously poisoned. The day of 19th Dec (the presidential election day) is the
judgment day that will defeat the people who ruin our country. We need to
carefully use our rights not to support the people who have sunk into vice…”
(Jung-Eun Cho)

Basically, ‘Lee’ refers to the previous president in Korea and ‘Park’ refers to a
candidate for the current presidential election. As both of them are from the right-wing
party, their political beliefs are quite similar to each other. In the past the president
‘Lee’ conducted a particular public project which was to enhance the economic growth
but at the same time, which raised a serious environmental issue. I was not sure that if
the note on Jung-Eun Cho’s SNS account was written by her or was copied from
another’s writing but it played a role of strongly presenting her political belief that was
along with the left-wing’s argument.

Eun-Je Park who also supported the left-wing complained about the situation that she
faced when she went to the poll:

“Politics makes my life stressful. If I don’t vote for the right-wing, I will be kicked
out of my family... hahahahahahaha... Saenuri Party (the right-wing) uses the
colour red for the symbol of the party. I don’t know why my father calls me the red
left winger⁴. ” (Eun-Je Park)

The expression ‘if I don’t vote for the right-wing, I will be kicked out of my family’
illuminates the pressure that Park felt under. With all of her family supporting the right-
wing party and she felt obliged to follow the assigned familial political stance. Despite

⁴ Traditionally the Labour Party has branded themselves in red whereas the Conservative Party has branded
themselves in blue (Gent, 2011).
this she tried to uphold her personal political views and to articulate these through her dealings with others. This was seemingly to assure herself of her position but also to receive affirmation that these views were acceptable.

Moreover the majority of the BORA members chose to read newspaper articles from the press which was famous for supporting the left-wing in Korea. The relationship between the press and politics, in particular the political leanings of the newspapers, cannot be ignored. Depending on the political leanings, newspapers release diverse interpretations or stories regarding the same issue as BBC (2009) shows a guide to the political leanings of the big daily papers. The BORA members sometimes purchased the newspaper called *The Hankyoreh* which is a progressive newspaper (*The Hankyoreh*, 2014) and they brought them to the BORA meeting. Moreover, during the interview, I asked their preference of newspaper press (if they have one) and the majority of them answered that they subscribed to the left leaning papers.

To synthesise, the BORA members were quite active in sharing and discussing social issues including political aspects. They also had the political leanings in common which unite them together. As ethical consumption belongs to the social and political issues, this phenomenon might be a matter of course.

4.1.5 The common interest of the BORA

Despite diverse backgrounds, the BORA members seemed to have a particular vision towards life. The members were composed of university students, part-time/full-time employees and unemployed people. Most of them were in their 20’s, currently living in Seoul or near Seoul. Some of them originally came from remote villages and some were from urban areas across Korea. The areas of their studies and works were also diverse, ranging from Management, Art, Design to Social welfare, etc. Most of the members went to university, which was not surprising in that the university entrance rate was very high in Korea, 71.3% in 2012 (Jang, 2014). The BORA members pursued equal status within the group and this was connected to the pursuit of egalitarianism. Oxford Dictionaries (2014a) defines the notion of egalitarian as ‘believing in or based
on the principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities’. In other words, egalitarianism puts emphasis on equality of ‘all people’ rather than ‘individuals’. In terms of pursuing the value of living together, the notion of communitarianism could also be employed. This view was reflected upon the BORA’s approach to activities and management. The BORA members used the expression of ‘not just for me but for all’ when they talked about ethical consumption:

“I think ethical consumption is not just for my own benefit but it is also for others’ benefits. I mean consumption for all of us. You know what I mean? In here ‘us’ implies ‘all’ including myself. (...) My family is also interested in ethical consumption but it is a bit different from my view towards ethical consumption. I mean my mom tries to buy organic or local produce because she concerns a lot about the family health. She doesn’t care about ethical consumption but part of her consumption belongs to ethical consumption. However, I consider ethical consumption first in my mind. I rather give up having a comfortable life in order to conduct ethical consumption in my daily lives. If considering the aspect of intention, ethical consumption practices conducted by my family are not the real... if considering the result aspect, it is ethical consumption.” (Sung-Kyung Kim)

Kim demonstrates that there is a difference in ethical consumption between herself and her family. Kim argues that her ethical consumption activities are for ‘all’ rather than for ‘herself’ as she chooses to give up something comfortable in her personal life. In other words, she tries to live in an ethical way because the pursuit of ethical values is a priority in her life. She believes that her self-sacrificing way of living, like giving up comforts, exercises a positive influence on the society which is helpful for all. However, her family conducts selective ethical practices based mainly on the family-oriented values. In this vein, she believes that ethical consumption practices conducted by her family are mainly or only for the family members so she sees this as for ‘individuals’.

However, if considering the aspect of results, ethical consumption practices conducted by her family are actually for ‘all’ because they exercise a positive influence not only on the family members themselves but also on society. Kim’s ethical consumption
practices include her self-sacrificing aspect so the results may be seen to be highly beneficial for others. Kim accepts troublesome works such as bringing her tumbler or walking rather than taking a taxi. However, Kim rather focuses on the aspect of intention rather than the aspect of result when conducting ethical consumption practices. As ethical consumption practices conducted by her family are entirely based on their personal purposes, the practices are quite selective and are likely to finish as a one-off event. Kim is different from her family in terms of choosing to give up her comforts in daily life in order to keep living in an ethical manner. In other words, her family’s ethical consumption activities go against the concept of continuity which the BORA members put a particular emphasis on. This is connected to how the BORA members understand and interpret the concept of ethical consumption. This will be further discussed in section 4.2.

The value of building a symbiotic relationship (along with egalitarianism), which the BORA members pursued, was also found in their interests in the socially weak. The majority of the BORA members were strongly sympathetic to the socially weak such as the old, the disabled or the children in less developed countries. Thus, they got involved in the activities they could help them with. Some members chose to prove their consideration of the socially weak by participating in volunteer works they are interested in. Hibbert et al. (2003) also found that to volunteer for a particular project, it has to be something that you are interested in. Byung-Kun Kim found a volunteer group and registered as a group member in order to do something meaningful to her. Kim was very enthusiastic when she described what she did for the volunteer work:

“I was involved in a volunteer group called ‘Walk together’. I participated in this group for 3 years...This is run by the city of Seoul. This group is only for university students who stay in Seoul. The work was to choose a school and spend time with the students who stay at school after classes. I particularly focused on primary school students whose parents worked until night. As they had relatively few opportunities to visit educational or cultural places such as exhibitions or science centres, my role was to bring them to those places and offer some experiences which they couldn’t have before. If some students had difficulties in their studies, I
also helped them. For instance, when they learned some scientific principles about the wind during the class, I created an opportunity to do an experiment with a hand-made weathercock.”(Byung-Kun Kim)

She found this volunteer work meaningful because she could immediately see that she helped someone. That was why she continued do the volunteer work for the last three years.

To synthesise, the BORA members focused on living in harmony with others. Marshall (2012) claims that the reason why people volunteer is that they want to give something back to the world. As the BORA members also believed that they were benefited by the world, they wanted to make a contribution to the society. Rather than focusing on their personal benefits, they pursued to live together co-prospering.

4.1.6 Summary

This section 4.1 established the foundation of the organisational dynamics of the BORA. This section covered various aspects of the BORA such as the history, the organisational characteristics, the political belief and the common interest of the group. As mentioned above, an organisation reflects its ethos and beliefs on the activities and performances. In other words, an organisational culture is expressed and presented through the activities conducted by an organisation. By the same token, the BORA also presented their ethical ethos and beliefs by developing and conducting their own ethical consumption activities. Therefore, the BORA’s various forms of ethical consumption activities will be explored in the following sections. Following this, the meanings and values of the activities will be examined with a reflection of the organisational culture of the BORA.
4.2 Ethical consumption: Always becoming the ethically conscious consumer

4.2.1 Introduction

In the modern consumer society, there are a variety of groups which focus not only on the issues related to personal consumption, but also on the broader subjects which can have an influence on the society for now and in the future (Bauman, 2000). The BORA is a type of voluntary consumer group which presents their concerns about or interests in the issue of consumption at a personal and social level by creating and conducting their own activities. As was described in the previous section 4.1, the BORA is particularly interested in the matter of ethical consumption because ethical consumption is something we seem to be familiar with and at the same time we don’t actually know what it is. For instance, people by and large believe that ethical consumption is about purchasing ethically produced goods or doing some occasional event-type ethical consumption activities such as boycott campaigns. Then is ethical consumption something special? Is this only for a certain group of people? The BORA believes that ethical consumption can be part of our daily lives if we create and conduct our own way of ethical consumption activities. In this way, they pursue to keep carrying on ethical consumption activities and ultimately have the value of ethical consumption embedded in their everyday life.

Now it is important to explore the activities the BORA creates and conducts, and the meanings behind these activities. The next section will show how the BORA comes up with the ideas of their activities which reflect their own cultures and identities embedded in the group. As detailed in the methodology chapter, most of their activities were observed on-site and more detailed background stories were acquired from the in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher. In this section, two activities in which one represents an internal activity and another one is an external activity were selected and explored in great depth. To further understand the BORA’s views toward the meanings, intentions and positions of ethical consumption, I also compared the BORA’s activities with other activities undertaken by other similar organisations in South Korea.
The section concludes by re-visiting and re-constructing the notion of ethical consumption based on a close examination of its complex nature.

4.2.2 Forms of ethical consumption

4.2.2.1 Sharing Party

One of the activities which reflected the BORA members’ understanding of ethical consumption was an internal activity called a ‘sharing party’ (see Picture 1): each member brought any items that were not in use for themselves and gave them to other members who would like to have them. Once the goods were introduced by the owner, other members who would like to have them could take them. For example, one member brought several items such as new notebooks, used books, letter papers, glasses and CDs. A pair of glasses was presented by the owner who’d had LASIK eye surgery. The glasses were bought by the charity second-hand shop ‘The Beautiful Store’, and they were still usable and fashionable in some ways. As Picture 1 shows, the glasses were put in the case with the Beautiful Store price tag. Some members freely took what they needed, but there were some leftovers untaken. One member who had a plan to go on a volunteer trip to Cambodia next month took the leftovers in order to donate them in Cambodia.

Picture 1 Sharing party
A member explains the products which he brought. As he read the book several times he wanted to give it to others who would like to read. The glasses bought by the charity shop called ‘The Beautiful Store’ were donated as well. Most goods were in good condition so those who needed these items were happy to take them.
An ethos behind this activity is that there are no ‘unnecessary’ things but there are only things which are misplaced. Everything is useful in that they are made with a certain purpose. Unnecessary goods such as useless sundries are just waste for one person, but they are valuable for someone else: those who want them. Moreover this activity makes it possible for someone to re-think of buying new things by getting him or her involved in this activity. One member says,

“I think buying something ethical is about ethical consumption but at the same time not buying is also an ethical consumption. I believe that purchasing itself is the problem because we cannot live without buying. Thus using flea markets is relatively ethical because at least they do not produce new things but they rather recycle the existing things.” (Young-Soo Cho)

Cho demonstrated that ethical consumption should not be limited to the purchasing aspect. Reducing the amounts of purchasing itself should be considered one part of ethical consumption. As she believes, people cannot live without the marketplace. Thus a complete defiance to the market is a distant goal to achieve. Likewise, the BORA members tried to find their own ways of ethical consumption, creating the ‘sharing party’ activity. It was a negotiated and compromised form of ethical consumption because the BORA could still purchase or gain something during the activity but they ultimately reduced the purchase of new items.

4.2.2.2 The 2012 World Fair Trade Festival

The BORA members participated in the 2012 World Fair Trade Festival in Seoul, Korea by conducting their own form of activities. Even though the participation of festival was considered to be a one-off event-type activity which was not heavily valued by the BORA, the BORA members found it an opportunity to let the public know about their views and understanding of ethical consumption. Before describing the BORA’s activity, an explanation about the festival seems to be in order as it explains why the BORA members join this particular event. The event is a festival celebrating the World Fair Trade Day run by the World Fair Trade Organisation with 300 organisations from 70
countries participating. The core body of this event was the city of Seoul, the Korea Fair Trade Organisation, and approximately 60 to 70 organisations such as university groups, Fair Trade-related organisations, non-profit organisations or ethical consumption-related companies attended.

The organisations involved with this event set up a booth and ran their own programmes. Most of the booths focused on selling Fair Trade products or promoting Fair Trade brands in order to generate revenue or have their potential customers. During the event, the Mayor of Seoul proclaimed the city of Seoul as the first Fair Trade city in South Korea (Cho, 2012). It was a significant event not only for the whole Korean society but also for all the participating groups because through this event, Fair Trade involving ethical consumption and production could be widely informed across the public arena.

The event was based mainly on the topic of Fair Trade but some other ethical issues such as environmental issues were also dealt with. It was held in the city hall square which is located in the middle of Seoul and it was open to the public without any entrance fee. Most of the visitors were university students and families. When I asked the visitors how they knew about this event, they answered that they acknowledged the event from the advertisements on social media or word-of-mouth but most of the visitors came by accident. As this event was held on Saturday afternoon in the middle of the capital city, a lot of people had a chance to pass by.

There were a lot of booths which dealt with Fair Trade products, introducing their brands and selling their products. The examples of these booths are introduced and described as follows: First of all, there was a booth of an ethical fashion company displaying their sample goods with a description board and promoting their brands. They explained that the products were imported from developing countries through a fair trading system and that they were made with recycled cottons dyed with natural ingredients. As the board shows the phrase ‘make your Fair Trade eco bag’, visitors were given opportunities to make their own eco bags. It is an example of co-production with visitors as they can directly be involved in designing and finalising their own bags.
However, it was not possible for visitors to check on site how the Fair Trade eco bags had been made and imported because they were involved in only putting some additional designs on the bag. In other words, visitors didn’t participate in the core part of the co-production which could have enabled them to experience the essential part of ethical production and consumption.

**Picture 2 A booth of an ethical fashion company participating in the 2012 World Fair Trade Festival**
A booth from an ethical fashion company introduced and sold some of their products such as Fair Trade eco bags or clothes. The displayed goods were examples so visitors might get some ideas to design their bags. If the visitors wanted to buy the displayed goods, they could purchase them. I felt that this booth was like a little shop in an open market. They also offered a summary of the ethical values of their products in Korean on the board.

Second of all, a booth from the Seoul Global High School made and sold sugar candies, introducing and promoting ‘Muscovado’ which is a type of unrefined Fair Trade organic brown sugar imported from the Philippines (see Picture 3). They focused on selling sugar candies by emphasising that they were made with Fair Trade organic ingredients. They sold a sugar candy for 500 Won (£0.25) and it was particularly popular with children. Then mothers who came with their kids casually had an interest in this Fair Trade organic sugar. It was the first time I had come across or seen anything about this product and some BORA members were also unfamiliar with it. In terms of making people know about the fact that there are various Fair Trade items, this activity proved valuable. However, this ‘Muscovado’ booth was similar to the ‘eco bag’ booth in terms of offering the information about ethics with the product they sold because it
was not different from any other shops in the high streets even though it claimed to be doing Fair Trade activity. When I visited the booth in order to see the Muscovado sugar and listen to the explanation about it, the members didn’t talk about Fair Trade but they rather focused on making and selling sugar candies. Visitors merely purchased ethically produced goods in this booth without having enough opportunities to learn, understand and experience the principle or philosophy of ethical consumption.

**Picture 3 A booth of the Seoul Global High School participating in the 2012 World Fair Trade Festival**

A booth from the Seoul Global High School promoted unrefined Fair Trade organic sugar by making and selling sugar candies on site. The members briefly explained the main purpose of selling sugar candies made by ‘Muscovado’ was to introduce the Fair Trade organic sugar. They were from a school club which was composed of students who had an interest in Fair Trade. They participated in this festival as part of their extracurricular activities.

Thirdly, there was an ethical consumption (campaign) group called ‘The Beautiful Coffee Squad’. This is run by a social movement firm ‘The Beautiful Store’. The Beautiful Store is the first registered social enterprise in South Korea, running more than 150 stores (The Beautiful Store, 2014). With support from finance and human resources from the Beautiful Store, the Beautiful Coffee Squad conducted promotional campaigns during the festival. Their activities were about delivering ethical messages. For instance, they invited experts in this field and conducted short seminars free of charge. They talked about the general information of Fair Trade such as how Fair Trade is different from the ordinary trade (non- Fair Trade) system. For the visitors, it was a good chance to learn the field of Fair Trade. The booth also ran a one-day café, selling
and promoting some of the Beautiful Store’s products such as Fair Trade coffees so the
visitors were exposed to the promotion of Fair Trade goods.

To synthesise, even though these three organisations conducted different activities by
dealing with different types of products, what they arguably pursued was to promote
particular ethical products or ethical brands to the visitors. Regarding the issue of
ethical consumption, what they focused extensively on was for people to consume
ethically produced goods.

However, the BORA had a different view towards ethical consumption. Their activities
were quite different from other activities undertaken by other organisations. They
avoided dealing with ethically produced goods during the festival because they
perceived there to be the limitations of purchasing ethically produced goods. One
participant stated:

“You know I face some situations which do not allow me to purchase ethically
produced goods. My friends who are not interested in ethical issues always ask me
to go to Starbucks when we meet. I know that Starbucks deal with some Fair Trade
coffees but only in limited ranges. As Starbucks do not offer Fair Trade coffees at
their stores and only sell them as packaged goods, I try not to go there. However I
have no other options if my friends ask me to go there. I may try to find some
ethical coffee shops, but I sometimes have difficulties finding them. In that
situation, I just go to Starbucks or any other coffee shops, but I try to do
something ethical even in that situation such as using mugs rather than plastic
cups.” (Hyun-Soo Sung)

Sung emphasises that people sometimes face difficult situations to purchase ethically
produced goods. She explains the social situation which makes it hard for her to
purchase ethically produced goods such as meeting her friends who do not consider
ethical aspects in their consumption. This kind of situation can easily happen in our
daily lives. Especially, in Korea where culturally a social hierarchy is evident within the
society (Lee et al., 2012), it is rather difficult to stick to purchasing ethically produced
goods because people rarely insist on their purchasing tastes. This is similar to what Chemin (2014) explains the food consumption in France: “in France, food is a collective concern, almost a form of communion: the idea of sharing is a key part of the meal. So there are customs it’s hard to get around - people will take a poor view of someone who doesn't partake of the main dish or only eats gluten-free foods. What counts most of all is conviviality.” The BORA activity at the festival sought to consider these types of social and structural issues to get visitors to think about how they can be ethical even if they cannot buy ethically produced goods.

The new members from Group 4 also talked about what they’ve learnt and how their understandings regarding the notion of ethical consumption have changed through their activities.

**Interviewer:** Could you tell me about the most memorable experience among the BORA activities?

**Joo-Sun Bae:** Hmm... the most memorable one... I just came up with Sung-Kyung Kim’s TED workshop. She brought her re-form products. And Byung-Kun Kim told that she would attempt to live on vegetables for two weeks and she looked quite hard... She couldn’t drink milk so she put some bean powder in water and had cereals with it. I came up with this kind of daily practices.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think they are so memorable?

**Joo-Sun Bae:** What I learned from their experiences was that ethical consumption was not just about buying products, but also about re-forming goods or reducing wastes. I also knew that a vegetable diet was a part of ethical consumption but it was so special that someone actually tried to do it...

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me why a vegetable diet is a part of ethical consumption?

**Joo-Sun Bae:** As far as I know, if you eat meats, there is an increase of carbon which can make a negative influence on the environment. I actually love to eat meats so I was not very close to a vegetable diet.
However, when I listened to others’ experiences and the afterwards feelings, I started to have an interest in it and have a positive thought regarding vegetables...

As this interview transcript shows, the new members started to face changes in their thoughts about the concept of ethical consumption during the BORA activities. By sharing other members’ knowledge and experiences of ethical consumption, Bae started to think of new sides of ethical consumption, for instance, a variety of types of activities such as re-forming goods or reducing meat consumption. The BORA members acknowledge that ethical consumption is more than buying products, and it is closely connected to everyday conduct.

Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007, p. 136) describe consumers who pay a premium for ethical products as status seekers looking for “a hip guise for bourgeois consumerism” rather than questioning the system of production. The BORA members also seemed to share this concern and view. Instead of promoting or selling the products, the BORA members developed enjoyable practices for the festival which allowed the visitors to remember and continually conduct them after the festival such as face painting, making wish bracelets and making coin purses with used milk packages. Of importance is the aspect of going beyond buying ethically produced goods and offering the idea of other types of ethical consumption activities. This was the main intended message they sought to promote at the festival. They focused mainly on the practices for children in which other organisations relatively ignored for the reason that the children didn’t make the actual purchase. Therefore the activities had to be easy and simple but fun so all the visitors including children and the BORA members themselves could experience and adopt ethical messages in a casual and easy manner. One of the BORA members stated:

“...I thought about the concept of Fair Trade while I was reading a book about Fair Trade... I can’t remember the title of the book... but I took a note about some parts that I liked... Fair Trade has some contradictory aspects... you know Fair Trade basically involves the issue of import and export. I think we can just have
the local foods and this is the way to reduce having imported goods even though they are fairly traded. ...I believe that ethical consumption is not just about the things that we see... for instance the Fair Trade certification symbol does not always mean something positive. We need to focus more on small habits or actions that we actually do rather than... Using an eco-bag is not meaningful unless you use it more than thousands times. It is the same as using plastic bags. Thus it is important to focus on something we can do in a continual manner. To do something continually requires fun aspects. I mean something we can enjoy. I always think about something fun when doing BORA activities.” (Ko-Yun Jung)

Interestingly, Jung has a doubt about the notion of Fair Trade. Fair Trade is valuable in that some parts of ethical businesses may be able to destroy the developing world’s sweatshops, plantations and mines root and branch. However she argues that there are some hidden issues in relation to the Fair Trade certification mark. She further explains that there are power relations to get Fair Trade symbols, for instance, small ethical firms cannot afford to pay the fees to use the official symbols on their products. Even though their products are ethically produced, people do not trust them if there are no Fair Trade marks. People by and large do not think about this kind of hidden aspect of Fair Trade but they believe that their role ends in purchasing Fair Trade products which have Fair Trade symbols. In the book Unfair Trade, Woodman (2011, p. 72) also lifts the curtain to look behind the ethical businesses, arguing,

“The biggest part of the Fair Trade organisations’ profits comes from the wholesale dealers’ expenses. The amount that the wholesale dealers pay for using the official Fair Trade brand/symbol accounts for 90 per cent of the UK Fair Trade organisations’ whole profits. Half of them are spent for the administrative fees such as managing the certification marks. Then do the rest half of them return to farmers? No. The rest of them are spent for the campaigns and advertisements of the Fair Trade brands.”

As Woodman argues, the issue of Fair Trade involves tensions between motive and application. Moreover these issues are hidden from the public. Purchasing Fair Trade
goods is a simple and easy way of conducting ethical consumption but this is not the only answer. As Jung puts emphasis on the needs of critically thinking about Fair Trade goods, relying entirely on the purchasing aspect is not enough and the consumers’ roles have to go beyond this level of ethical consumption.

This view was commonly agreed upon by the BORA members, and was settled as the major ethos of the group. One of the BORA members clearly showed this point of view, stating:

“I don’t really agree that the reason of doing ethical consumption is to offset the moral responsibility. Active ethical consumers should correct the errors caused in the production processes and support the ‘right’ producers. Even though we cannot expect to have big changes, it is still valuable.” (Hyun-Soo Sung)

Sung demonstrates that ethical consumption is not just about fulfilling one’s morality but also about contributing to society. Focusing merely on purchasing ethically produced goods can be limited to having the personal satisfaction in terms of acting on one’s own moral responsibility. The ethical acts only for individual satisfaction can happen in an inconsistent manner because consumers do not have any obligation or responsibility for unethical purchasing behaviour but they may have some voluntary responsibilities (Nebenzahl et al., 2001). Swinyard et al. (1989) also argue that consumers may act unethically in order to maximise their individual and family economic welfare. In other words, consumers can easily act unethically in their consumption only if considering their personal satisfaction. This is similar to ‘situationists’ who judge the ethics of behaviour by the consequences of its outcomes (Rawwas, 1996). The choice of acting ethically or unethically can extensively be influenced by the expected outcomes. In this way, the BORA members believe that ethical consumption should not be limited to an individual level but should also be at a social level. In line with this, Engel and Blackwell (1982, p. 610) explain the term ‘socially conscious consumers’ saying, “those persons who not only are concerned with their own personal satisfactions, but also buy with some consideration of the social and environmental wellbeing of others”. Following the ethos of socially conscious
consumers, the BORA members found or thought of various ways of doing ethical consumption and their own activities were created and conducted as follows:

First of all, some BORA members who majored in Art and Design volunteered to paint some pictures of Fair Trade products such as bananas or coffee beans on the visitors’ faces or bodies, while telling the story of Fair Trade (see Picture 4). As the festival had a clear theme which was to let people know about Fair Trade, the BORA wanted to encourage children to acknowledge the notion of Fair Trade and understand the processes of Fair Trade with ease. Face painting was a useful tool to make the members and the visitors sit close and talk about Fair Trade. Mothers who came with their children asked about some practical information about Fair Trade goods such as the location of Fair Trade stores. This activity was brought about by the idea of being active rather than passive because it included an interaction not just a single direction of communication such as purchase. As for the visitors, it was a good chance to meet with the issue of Fair Trade because they’d so far had little opportunities in this regards.

**Picture 4 Face painting activity**

The visitors chose a picture from the drawing board and the members drew it on the visitors’ body explaining the stories about Fair Trade. As drawing took a certain amount of time, the BORA members found time to talk about Fair Trade. For the children, the notion of Fair Trade could be difficult and boring so the face painting was a useful tool to make them have an interest in it.

Secondly, the BORA members made wish bracelets with some threads and gave them to the visitors when they gave right answers to Fair Trade related questions (see Picture
5). For instance, the visitors had to choose the correct form of Fair Trade mark. Offering wish bracelets was a kind of decoy which attracted the visitors to be involved in their activities. Even though the visitors participated in the BORA’s activities because of the free gift, they at least could be exposed to and learn about Fair Trade. The quiz was composed of easy questions about Fair Trade, and even those who didn’t answer the questions could find it a useful time to learn Fair Trade. The main purpose of this activity was to encourage the visitors to learn something by playing a game - gamification. In other words this activity was a kind of edutainment which was composed of education and entertainment. Making wish bracelets was quite easy for the BORA members because it didn’t require any special skills or a huge amount of budget. Just three to four threads of different colours were intertwined, becoming a simple but fashionable item for young people. In Korea, threads traditionally represent the meaning of good health and long life so it was a meaningful item for the visitors.

Picture 5 Learning the issue of Fair Trade via quiz games

When the visitors solved Fair Trade related questions, they could have a wish bracelet which was a fashion item made with threads. This simple activity let the visitors think about the issue of Fair Trade and allowed them to have knowledge in this field.

Finally, the BORA members prepared used milk packages and rubber bands to make coin purses for the visitors. They taught the visitors how to make the coin purses (see Picture 6) and it was popular with children and their mothers because they could do it again back at home. When I had a chat with the mothers, they said that they liked this activity because it taught their kids how to recycle milk packages for free. The
significance for the BORA members and visitors lay in that people could keep doing it in their daily lives. While making a coin purse, each member explained the processes of Fair Trade so the children could be informed the issue of Fair Trade.

Even though the activity of making coin purses was not directly related to the issue of Fair Trade, the BORA members found that it was a good opportunity to introduce ethical consumption in relation to Fair Trade. This is because Fair Trade is linked with ethical consumption so people who are interested in Fair Trade may have an interest in ethical consumption as well. One member who initially suggested the idea of making coin purses talked about how she came up with this activity:

“I visited England few years ago and I had a chance to do some volunteer works. One day, I visited the Camden Green Festival which was an environment-related festival regularly run in Camden. There were a lot of booths conducting various activities and one of them was a workshop booth. One girl in the booth taught me how to make a coin purse with a used milk package. It was a very interesting activity and I actually used the coin purse for a while. When I came back to Korea, I let my friends know about this because they were interested in it. They said that it was unique and had the UK vintage or somewhat Hippie style. As I found it practically useful, I thought that it could be an interesting activity for the kids and at the same time, it might be useful for them to know about the environmental issues or the concept of recycling.” (Jung-Eun Cho)

Fair Trade is by and large considered to be part of ethical consumption (Nicholls and Opal, 2005). The activity had a value in the way of letting the visitors experience and learn how ethical production and consumption could be done. In other words the BORA emphasised that ethical consumption could not only be done by companies but also be conducted by the visitors themselves. As Cho found this activity memorable, the visitors found it interesting and useful to understand part of ethical consumption and production. The visitors felt that they learned a social issue by joining a kind of the arts and craft class we normally had in a primary school. The activity was not the perfect form of ethical consumption in that the visitors and the BORA members did not
participate in the production of the materials used and the materials were not ethically produced. However the BORA members put emphasis on doing something ethical by using the materials they had in their daily lives. In this sense, the BORA members see this as what I describe as a negotiated and compromised form of ethical consumption. They were working within the structural constraints and being active and creative rather than just buying an ethical purse.

**Picture 6 Experiencing ethical consumption and ethical production**

Making coin purses with milk packages is good for children to learn about recycling and to make an everyday item re-usable. A visitor learns how to make it from the participant group members.

All the BORA’s activities were educationally useful in that those enjoyable activities helped the children understand the concept of Fair Trade. (Field note 34: 12/05/12)

Moreover, the activities conducted by the BORA were significant in that the BORA members actually got involved in the processes of ethical production and consumption. Even though those processes were negotiated and compromised, it became obvious to me that ethical consumption for the BORA members is considered never to be perfect. The practice of making Fair Trade eco bags done by an ethical fashion company included the visitors’ participation in designing their own bags, but it didn’t allow them to acknowledge and experience the ethical messages during the activity (see picture 2). This was because the main part of the activity for the visitors was to design their own bags rather than experiencing or learning something ethical. However the BORA’s activities were clearly differentiated from other organisations’ activities in that they created and conducted activities which accommodated ethical messages through interactions among the BORA members and the visitors.
After the festival, writing a field note and a reflection diary entry for the day, I looked back through the previous field notes about their festival planning meetings. From the planning to the actual implementation of the festival, the BORA had a clear goal to help people learn and appreciate ethical consumption. They attempted to make people understand and appreciate the values of ethical consumption, and that ethical consumption was not very difficult or burdensome to practice continually in daily lives. Even though the market offers more obvious options such as purchasing ethically produced goods, it denies the individual in the process and builds barriers to engaging in ethical consumption more widely. In contrast, the BORA’s activities showed how to be ethical and purchase is not always necessary. They were not difficult activities but did require some effort, creativity and ingenuity.

Above all, the BORA members played an important role in teaching visitors ethical consumption, and the visitors learned and experienced what ethical consumption was about. Then I was curious about the BORA members’ feelings or thoughts about the festival. After the festival, the BORA members gathered and had an after-event party. Most of them said that it was interesting to visit other booths and learn something new there. In particular, they were happy that they found numerous unknown ethical brands and products. They could see the types of products which were made in an ethical way and also the materials used in them.

Moreover, the BORA members enjoyed talking to people who were directly involved in the field of ethical consumption and production. A manager of an ethical clothing shop talked about his own experiences of finding and selecting the ethical materials (i.e. naturally dyed cottons) from rural areas in Bangladesh. Then, the BORA members asked some practical questions such as how the prices were negotiated or how these materials were imported, etc. The conversations with those members could never be found in the books or journals, but they were more like secret know-how or off-the-record stories. In this sense, the festival was an extremely good opportunity for them all to acquire and share knowledge about ethical consumption.

Another interesting thing was that one member made a coin purse for me. I considered
it as a souvenir because I didn’t want to actually use it. It was more like a memory of ethical activity for me. However, the coin purses were seen to be actually used by some other BORA members. They said that they needed a coin purse but they didn’t want to pay for it. The coin purse made with milk package was useful to keep coins in as the package was coated with a kind of vinyl, it kept coins clean and dry. Moreover, when their friends saw them and asked about them, it was a good opportunity to open discussion about ethical consumption with friends. By approaching the concept of ethical consumption through the BORA’s own way, they tried to construct their own consumer culture which could be apart from the mainstream market, and they actively situated themselves in it.

Shaw and Riach’s (2011, p. 1059) study about ethical consumer also finds that, “an unwillingness to define oneself through mainstream consumer culture was common to all participants, revealing the strong conviction with which values were held.” What the BORA members ultimately wanted to achieve from this experience was not only to practice what they believed but also to be a part of a group who showed their identities and actively attempted to make an influence on society. From this, they wanted to emphasise that ethical consumption is more than purchasing ethically produced goods. They co-constructed and shared their own understanding about ethical consumption that included doing small actions continuously in daily lives. All these processes ultimately built the BORA’s own social space, shaping their own culture and identities and revealing their ethos of ethical consumption.

The BORA’s activities seemed to have a complex characteristic which was hard to define. Their activities seemed to pursue the goal of presenting and spreading their ethical consumption identity to the society, and at the same time, they put emphasis on having their own experiences. They focused on the aspect of putting an effort on everyday conducts so that people could continually be familiar with the notion of ethical consumption. A member from Group 3 said,

“You know… there is an issue that whether buying an eco-bag is better than using a plastic bag or not. I’ve heard that if you want to use an eco-bag in an ethical
way, you have to use it at least 100 times. However, most people do not use their eco-bag 100 times, but they believe that they are doing something ethical. Even though people do not know about the fact, they do consider something...so this could be ethical consumption for someone. So what I mean is that there are no exact boundaries to define an ethical consumption. As consumption is connected to every part of our lives, ethical consumption is also permeated into our daily lives.” (Ji-Ae Song)

Song claims that ethical consumption is hardly definable because there are no exact or definite answers about what ethical consumption has to be. It is hard to live in a perfectly ethical manner even for extensively ethically conscious consumers. In this sense, rather than expecting to have an enormous change from the participation of the field of ethical consumption, she puts emphasis on conducting activities embedded in our daily lives. From this, she believes that we can ultimately have a positive influence on society. It may sound too superficial or unrealistic at first. However, the aspect of doing something in daily life is actually the most realistic option that Song, and everyone at the BORA, can think of. Similar to this, another member also argues,

“Some of my friends actually criticised my lifestyle, arguing that the pursuit of ethical consumption was contradictory. They said that I could not always live in an ethical manner even though I made an effort on it. What they argued was that I could live in an ethical manner ‘now or sometimes’ because I didn’t have any difficulties now. However, I may face some unethical situations in which I cannot avoid. Of course I agree with their opinions and I know that I cannot perfectly be ethical anyway. However I told my friends that I am not finding an answer on how to live in a perfectly ethical manner. I am just trying to find possible routes to make our lives a little bit more ethical compared to the current.” (Kyu-Jung Kim)

Kim’s friends, who may be considered to have an outsider’s view, doubt Kim’s efforts to become ethically conscious consumers. They believe that Kim’s efforts do not make any differences and seem to be too superficial. Kim also agrees with their arguments about the possibility of never becoming a perfect ethical consumer. However, the
BORA members including Kim believe that a perfect ethical consumption can never be achieved, but rather that people are always able to become (becoming) ethically conscious. That is why they tried to develop small activities which could be conducted repeatedly in their daily lives. What they ultimately pursue is to become ethically conscious rather than becoming a complete (perfect) ethical consumer.

Moreover, it was clear that their activities were developed based on their lifestyles or something they could do well. This view resonates with what Shaw and Riach (2011, p. 1059) found; “some characteristics of the participants’ lifestyle were seen as shaping and affecting the definition of ethical consumption and thus, their ways of doing ethical consumption were not in themselves exclusive practices and choices.” In other words, the BORA reflected the collective or the shared sense of lifestyles onto their activities. Then an importance lies in the fact that they belong to a particular social context, constructing and sharing a particular culture. In this vein, it is important to further investigate the BORA’s social context including their characteristics, identities, beliefs and ethos which play a fundamental role to shape and affect their ethical consumption activities. A more in-depth discussion about the BORA’s social world will be made in the following section.

4.2.3 Summary and implications

The analysis of the BORA and their activities in this section 4.2 has shown various ways of presenting ethical consumption with a reflection upon the activists’ ethos and identities. The BORA members started to recognise and understand ethical consumption, from a different perspective which distinguished ethical consumption as reliant on buying behaviour. By sharing each other’s knowledge and experiences of ethical consumption, they started to focus on everyday practices including trivial actions because they believed that becoming a complete ethical consumer could never be achieved. The BORA members put every effort on becoming ethically conscious, and the effort was made through small activities which could be conducted repeatedly in their daily lives. This kind of belief was reflected in their activities and presented in various forms. The activities had a value in letting them acknowledge and understand
various types of ethical consumption in their daily lives. The BORA members tried to deliver a message that ethical consumption is not a difficult or burdensome task but it is easy to be conducted through our everyday practices.

The BORA’s activities demonstrate how the BORA members understand and interpret the concept of ethical consumption. They find that ethical consumption is much more complex than simply buying ethically produced products: the activity previous studies have mainly focused on. The BORA members argue that focusing solely on the purchase behaviour of ethically produced goods has limitations in fully understanding the nature of ethical consumption. This is because they believe that they cannot always buy ethically produced goods for a variety of reasons such as financial availability and lack of accessibility. They rather put emphasis on the micro-practices of ethical consumption in our daily lives which have been relatively neglected or ignored so far. They find the importance of making every effort in everyday practices. This is because ethical consumption is not something we can completely achieve, but it is something we are getting closer to. Nobody can become a perfect ethical consumer, we can only become ethically conscious. In this vein, ethical consumption is the process of becoming ethically conscious, and this view towards ethical consumption can serve to re-define the meaning of ethical consumption. The BORA members do not identify themselves or describe themselves as ethical consumer. Instead they use the term ‘ethically conscious’ to describe themselves and emphasise that there is a constant ‘becoming’ towards ethical consumption and lifestyle.
4.3 Realistic-Idealist: Realised through micro-practices/mundane consumption

4.3.1 Introduction

For Shaw and Riach (2011) ethical consumption can be understood as a symbolic concept that people show their beliefs and identities regarding the relevant social issues. Individual consumers understand the notion of ethical consumption in various ways so their ethical consumption practices may also vary. Gabriel and Lang (1995/2006) support this argument, clearly illustrating the varying consumer typologies including chooser, communicator, explorer, identity-seeker, activist, and citizen. One example where consumers present their identities and voices in relation to ethical consumption is the consumer’s resistance to the market (e.g. Penaloza and Price, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Lasn, 1999; Bordwell, 2002; Rumbo, 2002). Previous ethical consumption studies have been concerned with the exploration of consumer activism or political consumerism that are spectacular or overt collective actions (see The Burning Man Festival [see Kozinets, 2002a]) such as anti-consumption campaigns, boycotting, non-consumption, etc. (Stevens, 2008). However, in section 4.3, it is argued that consumer activism should not be limited to overt activities because it can unfold in other unexpected ways which represent a sort of subtle kind of activism. For instance, anti-consumption activity extends beyond boycotting or demonstrations to include various forms of activities such as the individual actions of reducing consumption and market interaction like voluntary simplicity (e.g. Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002; Maniates, 2002). In this way, consumers’ voices can be presented in a quiet and subtle manner in their daily lives. Therefore the aspect of ‘radically against’ the market is just one part of ethical consumption and the relationship between the market and consumption practices can be understood based on a wider perspective.

This section 4.3 explores various forms of collective actions of the BORA by investigating their actual experiences of ethical consumption. This is consistent with the study of Arnould and Thompson (2005) which argues that consumers actively construct, define and present symbolic meanings of their consumption through a variety of
everyday practices. The mundane aspect of consumption has been overlooked despite
the fact that numerous studies emphasise the importance of micro-practices of ethical
consumption in daily lives (Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001; Ulver-Sneistrup et al., 2011).
Hewer and Brownlie (2010) also argue that understanding a cultural economy of shared
everyday creativity is significant in understanding consumer voices. This section
attempts to further investigate the ethical values and meanings of everyday occurrences
by describing the BORA members’ micro-practices of ethical consumption in daily
lives, for instance, ‘food’ and ‘(coffee) drink’ consumption.

4.3.2 Personal sacrifice and individual effort: A ‘Balwoo Gongyang’ activity

The BORA put emphasis on the first day activity whenever they formed a new group
because it was like an initiation ceremony or induction day. It was the first time for new
members to face and experience what ethical consumption was about. As for the
existing BORA members, the first day was also very significant because they could
deliver the core messages or visions of the group to the new members. Therefore
existing members made every effort to impress new members about their ethical
consumption activities, trying hard not to give them pressure or a psychological burden.
They generated, instilled and reproduced cultural values of the BORA.

Most of Group 3 members recalled the first day activity conducted at a restaurant called
‘an eating house with no threshold’. One member described the situation and the
feelings she had:

“... We went to a restaurant called ‘An eating house with no threshold’ in Shin-
Chon area and had evening meals together. The restaurant offered local foods but
there was no menu. I mean there were rice and cooked vegetables so you could
make Bi-Bim-Bap (mixed vegetable rice dish). And there was no price shown so
customers were supposed to pay the fee as they wished. Another interesting thing
was that you couldn’t leave food. When you finished your dish, you had to pour
water on your bowl and drink it in the end. It was like a ceremony which could be
seen in Buddhism. You know... monks in Korea do this all the time...BUT I didn’t
do it. I mean I couldn’t really do the final part...pouring water and drinking it... I couldn’t really do it so I didn’t actually eat the food in there. I thought that if I was involved in eating foods there, I should do the final part so I just didn’t eat foods as well. Nobody pushed me to do it but you know...when most people do something, you cannot help following suit. I was not the only person who didn’t do this. When I got into the BORA, I didn’t expect to have this kind of experience. I was quite picky and sensitive about foods so this was the only thing that I felt hard but it was interesting and very new to me.” (Ji-Ae Song)

The excerpt above illustrates and presents the very issues of ethical food consumption through an everyday practice which all members are familiar with; eating a meal. A lot of issues are presented here like the labour typically undertaken by the restaurant, the responsibility for serving food and clearing of the bowls after eating, etc. Basically the restaurant gives an opportunity to the members to consider the value and quantity of food consumed coupled with the idea of waste. There was no predetermined price for the meal, and the diners were supposed to decide how much they were willing to pay. An ethos of the restaurant was that no leftover food on the plate was permissible. Any sauce remaining on the plate when the meal was complete was wiped away and eaten with a pickle. The bowl was then filled with water to be cleaned, and drunk by the diner.

The way of eating a meal was quite unusual for the new members and it had a lasting impression on the group members. Song described the first day activity as interesting and novel but there was something that made her feel she couldn’t join in. She seemed to have mixed feelings. She used the term ‘very new’, emphasising that she never had this kind of experience in her life. She didn’t expect to have this activity so she was astonished by the situation. When I listened to Song about her experience, I also felt that the first day seemed quite peculiar in terms of the choice of the place and the activities conducted.

The described eating activity is actually associated with the eating convention in Buddhism called ‘Balwoo Gongyang’. In Buddhism, ‘Balwoo’ is bowls containing a moderate amount of rice and vegetables, and ‘Gongyang’ means eating. Inspired by this
Buddhist eating convention, the BORA members decide to use this as an ethical consumption experience. There was no preaching or lessons given by existing BORA members. The aim was to experience an ethically conscious restaurant and to get this experience to assist new members to ‘think about’ and reflect upon their membership to the BORA. This is clearly associated with the BORA’s two core values of which one is personal sacrifice, and the other is individual effort. These values were exemplified through the first day of activities. Kim (2011) also explores this activity, calling it the ‘Clean Plate Movement’, investigating the three pillars of environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects for sustainable development. The choice of local produce for this Balwoo Gongyang activity includes a variety of symbolic meanings. For instance, the eater can be seen as a vegetarian, a Buddhist, an ethically conscious consumer or the person who pursues a healthy diet. However, the importance was in the particular performance or behaviour, not in the choice of this particular type of meal. In this case, having a dish prepared with local produce not only shows the symbolic meaning of ethical identity but also accommodates experiences of eating a moderate amount of food, cleaning one’s own plate, and paying what one can afford.

The choice of this particular venue also plays an important role in this activity because the restaurant adopts the pursuit of social values as an essential ethos and belief of their business. The restaurant was opened on May 2007. Since then, the restaurant has been well-known to offer traditional Korean dishes which are made of local and organic produce served buffet style. More importantly, the price of the dishes is set by the customers so payment is entirely dependent on the customers’ free will. The ethos of this restaurant is to become a pioneer of practising a symbiotic principle not only for the producers but also for the consumers (Oh, 2013). In this way, the restaurant ‘An eating house with no threshold’ is perceived to be a socially responsible place.

The venue was significant not just because it was socially responsible in its business but also because it enabled consumers to give opportunities to meet with ethical consumption, dealing with local produce for their meals. Buying local produce is also considered as part of ethical consumption, including various benefits in a social and personal sense (O’Rourke, 2006). For instance, money spent in local stores is likely to
go back into the local community. By and large, local produce do not produce over-packaged waste which can play down the environmental issues. Moreover indirect benefits such as saving in transport or delivery can be expected as well. It was observed that most of the BORA members preferred using local stores to franchises or conglomerates. One participant talked about this, saying,

“I love local markets. I normally go to local markets rather than huge supermarkets. Actually I tried to find my flat near local markets. My grandmother sold vegetables in local markets so I was familiar with local markets since I was young. However in these days, too many huge supermarkets are opened and I guess this affects the businesses of local markets. I am quite sensitive about this issue maybe because my family is directly connected to this issue. I mean I love to buy things in local markets. You know... mass products are nothing special...”

(Sook-Yeon Lee)

Even though Lee had a personal reason for being familiar with local markets, she has supported local markets since she was young. She considered the availability of local markets nearby when she moved to a new house. She also had a clear position regarding the new ‘market policy’ which was recently implemented in South Korea. The principal point of the policy is to impose legal controls on supermarkets’ business practices such as business hours and closing days. According to the policy, supermarkets should close their stores on every second Sunday. Several supermarkets filed a lawsuit against the local markets association for restricting consumers’ rights and free will to use the supermarkets. Local markets argued against the supermarkets and the subsidiary stores for them posing a threat to local markets. The law court accepted local markets’ claims, seeing the public good in which this policy is based could bring forth is larger than the private good which supermarkets could lose (Jung, 2014).

Among the members of Group 4, only half of them agreed with the policy but those who disagreed also supported the gist or intent of the policy. In other words, they disagreed with the policy not because it was purposeless but because it didn’t sound
effective. Jung clearly stated her opinion regarding this issue:

“I think the intent of this policy is good. I mean it sounds effective in terms of making more people use local markets and this is a good opportunity to intensify the local markets’ positions. However, I was actually embarrassed when the supermarkets were closed last Sunday. I had to buy something but the supermarkets were closed. However, you know what? I didn’t go to local markets either. Thus, what I thought was that the policy was not very good as it looked.” (Ba-Ram Jung)

Even though Jung didn’t support this policy, she had a positive opinion regarding the intent of the policy which was to help local markets. She thought that the policy itself was good but it wasn’t so effective for local markets as well as supermarkets. In relation to this, there is a newspaper article, reporting that people go to the department stores when supermarkets close on the weekends (Shin, 2014). In other words, people do not choose a local market as an alternative option for a supermarket. This is because people find local markets inconvenient for such reasons as lack of parking spaces, usability of credit cards, and lack of safety for their children (Shin, 2014). These reasons clearly demonstrate that the policy is ineffective, resulting in the BORA members’ withdrawal of their support. However the BORA members have a similar view to Jung’s opinion, being generally positive towards the intent of the policy. In this sense, the BORA members were positive towards local markets and local produce which enabled them to do ethical consumption so the venue and the activity taken during the first day were welcomed and memorable.

The BORA focused on a restaurant which accommodated micro-practices of eating out. From an ‘eating’ activity which is a daily practice for everyone, they found and experienced an ethical value. This activity itself was nothing special because it was an ordinary thing we all could experience in our daily lives. However it was special in terms of evidencing that ethical ethos could be achieved in micro-practices in everyday lives. Then ethical consumption does not necessarily have to be purchasing ethically produced goods.
4.3.3 Go beyond Fair Trade coffee: focusing on the receptacle for the coffee

In line with the example of food consumption, another example in which the BORA members emphasised the micro-practices of ethical consumption was about (coffee) drink consumption and the use of re-usable cups. When I attended a meeting with the BORA members in a coffee shop, I appreciated their effort and desire for purchasing Fair Trade coffee, but I felt I got a rude awakening. When discussing ethical issues regarding coffee, I normally came up with the issue of Fair Trade or organic products. Numerous researchers also focused extensively on Fair Trade when dealing with the topic of ethical products especially coffee (Bird and Hughes, 1997; Litterell and Dickson, 1999; MacGillivray, 2000; Loureiro and Lotade, 2005; De Pelsmacker et al., 2006). However the BORA members didn’t focus on ethically produced goods. Instead they placed a particular emphasis on the container of the coffee. In Korea, coffee is conventionally served at cafes in paper cups or plastic cups. This convention is widely supported for reasons of hygiene, portability and disposability. I was very much used to using paper cups, and took it for granted until that time. Upon sitting down with the group, it was apparent this was contrary to the remainder of the group who had ordered their drinks in re-usable cups. They said that they requested the staff members to put their drinks in mugs when they made an order. Several BORA members noticed my order and teased me about creating rubbish. A new member had also made a similar mistake at a different meeting, she noted:

So-Yeol Park: I ‘certainly’ bring my tumbler when I go to the BORA meeting but I sometimes forget to bring it when I go out.

Interviewer: Why do you ‘certainly’ bring your tumbler at the meeting?

So-Yeol Park: This is because it is strange to use a paper cup while having a meeting with the ethically conscious consumers.

Interviewer: Is this your own idea or do you actually need to physically present this kind of behaviour? Or do you feel guilty in some ways?

So-Yeol Park: I always feel guilty but I feel much guilty when I go to the BORA meeting because other members actually bring their own tumblers...

And bringing a tumbler is a kind of essential thing so I think that I
need to do so... I spent time searching various types of tumblers to buy and I bought a Starbucks tumbler. I printed the logo of the BORA group on the surface of the tumbler. I wanted to present myself as an ethically conscious consumer and a member of the BORA group...(smile)

Interviewer: Then do your friends see it and ask about it?
So-Yeon Park: No. As the logo shows a purple circle with the word ‘BORA’ (*which means ‘purple’ in Korean) my friends may think that I like the colour, purple. I just tell about the BORA group in advance... this is how I got involved in... and it is about ethical consumption... like this...

According to the excerpt, Park feels guilty when using disposable goods during the meeting with the BORA members. Park’s behaviour and thinking present a significant message which is clearly different from the new joiners in the BORA in terms of the way of approaching ethical consumption. Those who are not familiar with ethical consumption such as the new members or outsiders like me focus too much on the aspect of doing something ethical. Thus, they sometimes feel uncomfortable or even guilty. Existing members think more about the ways of not doing or avoiding unethical things.

Regarding the case of coffee shop, they focus on the aspect of not producing rubbish by using mugs. Rather than thinking of the way of doing something ethical, they firstly try not to do something unethical. When I was in a coffee shop with the BORA members, I also thought of doing something ethical such as buying ethically produced coffee but I never thought of the aspect of not doing something unethical.

Park also felt uncomfortable about using a tumbler made by Starbucks so she hid the brand name by covering it with the BORA logo. She printed out the BORA logo and put it on the tumbler. Even though Starbucks promoted and sold Fair Trade coffee, the BORA members didn’t consider the brand ethical because Starbucks sold Fair Trade coffee only in a package of beans, not in the form of drinks. Thompson and Coskuner-
Balli (2007, p. 136) also argue that, “the practices of purchasing the appropriation of ethical alternatives, such as Fair Trade lines by transnational companies including Nestle, Kraft and Cadbury’s can be criticised as merely feeding the very system it claims to be seeking to reform.” As the main business of Starbucks was to sell coffee drinks at stores, the great majority of their products were non-ethical goods and only a very little amount of products were considered ethical. In this vein, the BORA members considered Starbucks’ ethical strategy a marketing tool to boost a positive brand image and ultimately to take more profits. Along with this, Park said,

“You know... I chose Starbucks for the interview place because there were no options near this place. It seemed a bit ironical, wasn’t it? I found a McDonald’s next to Starbucks but I didn’t think we could do the interview in a fast food restaurant. It was too noisy. I normally do not go to Starbucks and I have a quite negative brand image of Starbucks. As I mentioned, I bought a creative tumbler in Starbucks but I hid the logo by covering it with the BORA’s logo. You know big companies or franchises... they open the stores in various places but I know that most of the local branches have to pay a lot of fees to the head office. Then actually the head office becomes rich but the local branches feel financially pressured in some ways. Moreover, the head office may develop some marketing skills to take more profits... Starbucks do not spend the gained profits for consumers or developing ethical stuffs…” (So-Yeol Park)

Park seemed not to appreciate the nature of profit-oriented companies. Park argued that Starbucks kept developing marketing strategies in order to take more profits. Selling packaged Fair Trade coffee beans was one of the strategies. Moreover she felt uncomfortable about the unfair relationship between local branches (franchisees) and the head office. However during the interview, I argued that basically local branches could gain a lot of profits because of the brand name, and they deserved to pay the price for it. Regarding the issue of selling packaged Fair Trade coffee beans in Starbucks, I believed that as Starbucks was one of the biggest coffee empires in the world, Starbucks’ contribution to the Fair Trade coffee industry should not be ignored even though it might account for only a small part within Starbucks’ business. In other words,
Starbucks might sell Fair Trade coffee in more quantity compared to local ethical coffee shops. Regarding my argument, Park demonstrated her position, saying,

“Yes, I agree with your opinion because we live in a society of free competition. I am not sure if my thought makes sense... But I don’t want to use the place which does not put the ethical aspect first... I like small or local companies which keep their beliefs...” (So-Yeol Park)

Park preferred firms which pursued ethical values prior to profits in their businesses. Park’s thoughts were similar to the idea of preferring local markets to supermarkets. This is because as O’Rourke (2006) argues, the money we spend in local markets or small independent shops generally goes back into the locality, helping maintain employment and creating a sense of community. However, conglomerates such as huge supermarkets focus on their bulk buying power which can exercise a pressure to drop the price. This can result in unethical behaviours such as poor working conditions for their labourers. If seen from an outcome-oriented perspective, Starbucks may be evaluated as ethical, compared to small local coffee shops which only deal with only Fair Trade coffees. However, as the section 4.1 of organisational dynamics of the BORA showed, Park didn’t take the result-oriented perspective. Instead, she put emphasis on the true intent of ethical consumption that companies ought to play a role in enabling an environment fostered to purchase ethically produced goods.

To synthesise, the participants looked for activities which required their effort and sacrifice because these types of activities were truly appreciated among themselves in terms of learning and experiencing the principles of ethical consumption. The reason for this was based on what they believed about becoming an ethically conscious consumer. As the previous section 4.2 shows, they believe that nobody can become a perfect ethical consumer. In other words, nobody can practise ethical consumption, never consuming unethical goods or never using goods in an unethical manner. In every situation, people face limitations or obstacles which hinder them from undertaking ethical consumption activities. Thus, it is crucial to make efforts to find people something they can do even in difficult situations, and to make them practise ethical
consumption in daily lives, even in a compromised manner. The individual is engaged in a process and movement whereby they are always ‘becoming’ ethical, a process never fulfilled.

4.3.4 Summary and implications

Ethical consumption has been understood as the ethical ethos and beliefs reflected upon one’s consumption practices. Individual consumers interpret and understand the notion of ethical consumption in various ways so it is assumed that ethical consumption is presented in various forms. For instance, people who have a low level of interest in ethical consumption may sometimes acknowledge and purchase Fair Trade chocolates or organic produce in marketplaces. On the other hand, people who are the active members of the Environmentalist group may not only pursue environmentally-friendly lifestyles in daily lives, but also actively participate in ethical consumption-related campaigns or demonstrations.

The BORA members also created and conducted their own consumption practices which contained ethical meanings and values. In particular, they focused on the activities which could be done in their daily lives that were connected to mundane consumption. In this way, they put emphasis on making every effort to practise ethical consumption in all available situations. For instance, the BORA members had an experience of food consumption in a restaurant which accommodated the ethical consumption practising diners. Moreover there was an interesting table manner to follow which originated from Buddhism. Even though some BORA members felt this activity awkward, they at least, experienced and acknowledged another type of ethical consumption in their daily lives. What it implies is that ethical consumption does not necessarily have to be purchasing ethically produced goods, but it can be found from the micro-practices in everyday situations.

Considering the choice of drinking cups was another example of the micro-practices of ethical consumption. When we talk about coffee in relation to ethical consumption, people normally come up with Fair Trade coffee and the labour issues of coffee
plantations. However the BORA members attached importance to the receptacles of their drinks which people tended rarely to pay attention to. They always asked the staff members to put their drinks in mugs when they had consumed them in in-house and they brought their own tumblers to take away. In this way, they reduced consumption of unnecessary disposable items such as paper or plastic cups.

The micro-practices what the BORA members focused on were obviously not a perfect form of ethical consumption. They seemed more like a negotiated and compromised form of ethical consumption. However there is no doubt that these kinds of micro-practices of ethical consumption are easy for everyone to continually conduct in daily lives. The BORA members believe that nobody can become a perfect ethical consumer, but people can always become ethically conscious with an effort of employing personal sacrifice and individual effort.
4.4 Sociality: Co-learning and diffusion through ethical consumption related activities

4.4.1. Introduction

Within consumer culture, consumption is associated with symbolic meanings that act as a means of communicating with others (Lury, 1996). Then, the material or object has cultural significance that is closely tied to the ways in which the users display a particular set of values. For instance, clothes are not simply a set of material objects to keep their wearers warm, but act as a symbolic code by which their wearers communicate their membership to social groups (Sahlins, 1976). When you visit a vintage fair, you may notice that there are numerous people who love to delve in second-hand, old-fashioned and vintage items. Those who find the vintage and rustic style valuable gather in a place like a vintage fair, and find the values and meanings of restoration, constructing and sharing their own cultures of ‘dumpster diving’ (Isenhour, 2012). In this sense, consumption becomes a means of constructing social groups that contains ‘shared experience, consciousness, rituals, traditions, emotion and a sense of moral responsibility’ (Cova and Cova, 2001; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Elliott and Davies, 2006). The BORA also was established as a social group by the like-minded people who found value of ethical consumption in daily lives. They tried to share and learn the ways of ethical living at a collective level. Here living at a collective level is not about living together in shared housing but it is about shared lifestyle. According to Clark (2006, p. 3), ethical living has become something more specific these days such as “adapting our lifestyles and shopping habits with the aim of reducing our negative impact (and increasing our positive impact) on the world’s environments, people and animals.” The BORA members also created and conducted specific ethical consumption practices and relevant activities at a group level in order to adopt an ethical lifestyle in their daily lives.

Section 4.4 starts with investigating a collective activity internally conducted by the BORA. By looking at how the BORA members co-learn and diffuse the ethos of ethical consumption through their activities, it challenges the view that ethical consumption is
anchored solely at the individual’s purchase of ethical products. It rather supports the role of sociality in ethical consumption, exploring the processes of the BORA’s social grouping and its construction of a group identity.

4.4.2 Sharing party

The BORA draws attention to the importance of their creation of ethical consumption activities because those activities show who they are and reflect how they understand ethical consumption. The practices are developed through the processes of sharing, learning and co-creating particular ethical values and behaviours among the BORA members. This brings an idea that ethical consumption is embedded in a group context.

One of the examples of the activities done at a group level is the ‘sharing party’ which was discussed in section 4.2. The BORA’s sharing party was, in brief, similar to the concept of a second-hand flea market or the car boot sale in the UK. It also included the concept of gifting and sharing. The members brought any unnecessary items from their homes, and other members who would like to have the items took or exchanged with other items. A central ethos was that unnecessary items for someone could be valuable for someone else. One of the BORA members explained this ethos based on what she read from a book called ‘Collaborative Consumption’:

“There are several examples of collaborative consumption. EBay is one of them. You probably know about EBay. The founder of EBay initially put a broken printer on an auction website and it was immediately sold. It was very interesting because the broken printer was obviously unnecessary for him. He met the person who bought the printer and asked the reason why he bought it. The buyer said that he was a printer collector. From this experience, the founder of EBay learned that something unnecessary to me could be a valuable thing to others. Based on this thought, he found the potentiality of second-hand markets or bartering markets so he established EBay. EBay annually earns 14 billion dollars and this is more than the GDP index of 125 countries in the world.” (Hyun-Soo Sung)
Inspired by second-hand sales, the BORA members tried to hold the sharing party regularly. They focused on the fact that people normally possessed a lot of items which were unused or outdated but still valuable. According to Wallop (2008), the average British household has £450 worth of unused goods such as unwanted gifts or outdated (but still valuable) clothes and technologies. The BORA’s sharing party was intended to involve an ethical meaning because it was possible to prevent someone from buying new things. The BORA members believed that reducing the number of bought new products could be considered ethical. This is because mass-produced goods are most often produced far away from the buyers’ country, in places where environmental and labour standards are weak, and where significant resources must be used to transport these goods to the buyer’s places (Isenhour, 2012). Chatzidakis et al.’s (2012, p. 506) study also shows a similar activity, explaining that, “Skoros which is a permanent gifting bazaar promotes anti-consumption and cultivates an ethos of gifting and sharing not only goods and services (e.g. hairdressing and furniture fixing) but also skills and knowledge (e.g. there are free weekly seminars on knitting and creative writing).” It is in line with the idea that the modern society dominated by global capitalism is all about excess because everyone has too many possessions.

However, it is debatable whether second-hand consumption can be considered ethical or not. Franklin (2011) argues that there are many young women who sell clothes to re-stock their own wardrobes. In this case, selling one to purchase another may solve nothing. Some may keep selling their possessions in order to purchase new items. Then, the initial purpose of second-hand consumption which is to reduce purchasing new products is ruined and distorted.

In this thesis the sharing party is understood as a creation of new ethical consumer culture rather than a problem-solving activity. Of course, the sharing party plays a role of problem-solving to a certain extent in terms of reducing the amounts of new items to be purchased. Another point which should not be ignored is that second-hand consumption is considered to be an activity of pleasurable leisure form (see the ethnographic work of Maisel 1976; Gregson and Crewe, 2003); for instance “Camden Lock Sunday Market became one of London’s leading tourist destinations, in common
with prominent flea markets elsewhere, and this then created the necessary conditions for second-hand markets” (Franklin, 2011, p. 162). Second-hand shoppers at least may have pleasure from having older objects and the accommodated memories. Likewise, the BORA members found joy in delving into others’ possessions and the gladness of sharing memories of the group members:

“I saw a TV programme from BBC which was about a visit to various second-hand markets, talking to people about the second-hand consumption. Unlike in Korea, second-hand consumption and barter system was very popular in the UK. Someone said that they exchange or sell everything except their family members and pets. The items people exchange or sell are the types of products which were attractive at first but become easily fed up with such as videos or books. You buy a video tape because it seems interesting and watch it one or two times. And then, you probably leave it in your room for ages. You can sell this kind of item in the second-hand market. However in the second-hand market, selling and buying is not the only thing you can have. Interestingly, the seller and the buyer may read and understand each other’s taste; for instance, a video tape of punk music concert plays a role of interacting between the seller and buyer because both of them are probably interested in the punk culture.” (Hyun-Soo Sung)

The BORA members could share the hidden stories of the items during the sharing party. In particular, the ethically produced items or the items which were purchased in ethical stores played an important role in connecting the BORA members together. Second-hand consumption was served to simultaneously bond and discipline members (Neilson and Paxton, 2010). In this sense, the sharing party became a cultural space for the members to share and experience each other’s consumption. They also had a chance to learn the ethical consumption culture as follows: in order to participate in the sharing party, the BORA members had to regularly organise and look back at their possessions and previous purchasing behaviours.

4.4.3 Used-book reading club
In general, individuals find it hard to do something in a continual manner. There is an old saying that ‘A resolution is good for only three days’. For instance people sometimes make a personal plan to be on a diet or quit smoking on New Year’s Day but they find it hard to keep doing it. However, if one is involved in a group or a community, the result can turn out differently because of the responsibilities existing in the social relationships and the power of social cohesion. By the same token, the BORA members thought that ethical consumption could more easily be conducted when they gathered in a group. In relation to this, the BORA members focused on the value of doing something together, and one of the BORA members talked about the notion of co-working:

“I’ve read a book and in there, the notion of co-working was quite interesting. There is a place called ‘cooperative office room’ made by Gred Newburg. He was a software engineer and he wanted to share his office room from 9 am to 5 pm with other freelancers. The idea was that several people gathered in a place and did their own works. Probably the works were different from each other, but what they had in common was the need of a place. As all of them in that place worked from 9 am to 5 pm, he found that the place was efficient for everyone and their works were productive. In this sense, the place was called the third place because it was hard to be defined. All people in that place did different works, but they worked together. The place became an interactive space. (...) Related to this, we could think of the value of communal lifestyle.” (Soo-Wook Park)

Park demonstrates the value of co-working by offering an example from a book. Like Park, most of the BORA members were positive in doing something together. They believed that they could expect to have more positive influences by doing something together. Related to this, the BORA member talked about co-housing:

“I want to try co-living... you know... the place where I live is in a newly developed area. There are so many apartments...so many...As you know ‘the peanut house’ is now really famous in Korea. If you open a shell of peanut, there are two peanuts. Like this, two houses can be built in one place. You know there
are separate rooms but two families may share the garden or the rooftop. I think it sounds great because you can form a kind of community with neighbours and share the lifestyle."(Kyu-Jung Kim)

“Yeah, I’ve heard about it. I heard about the notion of co-housing when the SEEDS invited the architects and ran a seminar. The architects attempted to do a project which was to make a place to share. Near Seoul, there were some abandoned buildings. They tried to buy a building for a reasonable price and change it to the places for various people. The space assigned for each person was entirely for the resident. One person used the place as an office room and the other used the place to sleep. One thing special was to share a common room so that the residents felt living together in some ways.” (Hyun-Soo Sung)

The BORA members applauded the issue of living together even though sharing a place with strangers was uncommon in South Korea. They basically liked to do something at a collective level. They found the value of doing something together so they conducted a variety of ethical consumption activities at a group level. It even included the activities which were normally considered to be done at a very personal level. The used-book reading club was one of them.

Since 2012 the BORA has run a reading club as a part of their activities in collaboration with a reading community called the ‘Bollok’. There is no obvious connection between a reading community and ethical consumption, and this is interesting that its link has been fostered. Before discussing the BORA’s used-book reading club, an explanation about the Bollok is in order to help understand why the BORA particularly chooses it as a partner.

The Bollok is run by a one-person corporation ‘Mindsoda’ which does IT business, making and selling websites or applications for smartphones. The CEO of Mindsoda knew one of the previous BORA members who currently worked at a used-book store as a manager. The BORA member talked about the BORA, including their activities, and the CEO of Mindsoda made a chance to participate in one of the BORA meetings.
At the meeting, a detailed explanation about the Bollok was made by the CEO of Mindsoda:

“The Bollok is a kind of book community which is run as an additional part of my main business. I run a company ‘Mindsoda’ which offers the services that allow people to have some cultural contents or experiences on the web. Among cultural contents, I particularly liked books so I launched the Bollok. In the beginning, I actually registered the Bollok as a company because I expected it to earn some profits. However, I couldn’t really have profits so I just set up a Facebook page and let people share their thoughts and feelings about books.” (Hyun-Soo Nam)

The Bollok is an online book community which allows people to freely upload and share their personal thoughts or comments regarding books. Anyone who is interested in books can get into the Bollok, and it is a useful place to share various stories about books. The website is composed of three sections; review of books, conversation about books, and sharing the tastes and interests in books. In the review section, people freely talk about their thoughts and feelings about particular books. Some people write a critical essay but some just upload a kind of diary. Others can make a comment regarding the uploaded articles. The conversation section is a saved chatting room. People can talk about books and these conversations can be seen by others. It is possible to see how people come to get interested in a particular book or how they come up with a particular book to read. Finally, people can share the tastes and interests in books by introducing particular books in particular fields. With the same subject, some may recommend science books, but some may suggest art books.

There are numerous social reading clubs but most of them require the participants to read a particular book in advance in order to talk about the book during the meeting. Thus the ‘reading’ activity is normally done at an individual level and sharing thoughts about the book is done at a collective level. However some people can feel pressured to join this kind of reading club because the participants of the reading club should buy or borrow the chosen book in order to finish reading it by the meeting date. Then it is expected to cause multiple purchases of the same book whenever they had the meeting.
The BORA’s used-book reading club problematised this and the Bollok was considered to be a suitable partner to run a reading club together. One of the BORA members uploaded a diary about the experience of the used-book reading club:

“The used-book reading club is a light and simple reading gathering. You don’t have to read books in advance, and you don’t have to think of your budget. You don’t have to talk about your thoughts during the meeting if you don’t want. You can just listen to others’ thoughts or feelings about particular books. And a ‘used-book store’ where the gathering is held, is an enjoyable place because everyone can have an experience of browsing and reading books, and share thoughts about it in a comfortable manner.” (anonymous)

The BORA’s reading club was distinctive from others not only by its characteristics, but also by the place the meeting was held. First of all, the BORA emphasised that reading was not just a personal activity but it could be done at a collective level:

“I had several experiences to join a kind of reading and studying community in the past. However it was a burden for me to read books in advance so I participated in the meeting just one time and I gave up joining any more. I just wanted to read books during the meeting. I also expected to meet some people who would like to join this kind of reading club.” (Kyu-Jung Kim)

As was revealed in Kim’s extract above, the essential value of this reading club was to read books together. In other words, all the processes from making a choice of books to reading and sharing feelings and thoughts about it were done at a collective level. Approximately 15 people participated in the first meeting. Most of them were the BORA members, but some of them were outsiders who were the siblings or friends of the BORA members. The previous BORA member who worked in a used-book store as a manager allowed them to use the bookstore as the meeting place. As the meeting was held just after the closing time of the bookstore, there were few customers. They browsed the bookstore and chose a book they wanted to read. They spent 30 to 40 minutes to read it. Some sat at a table, and others just squeezed in the space between
bookstands. After reading, some talked and shared their thoughts or feelings about the chosen books. Poul (1984, p. 47) explains the importance of conversations in a group by describing fandom’s subculture: “The members shared interests and outlooks that the rest of the world disdained. They thought in terms of science and the future, and when they were not reading or writing about those things, what they wanted most was to talk about them.” As for the BORA’s reading club members, sharing their ideas through conversations was an important part of this reading activity.

**Picture 7 Used-book reading club**

The BORA members freely browsed the bookstore and found books they were interested in. The bookstore was organised and divided into several sections based on themes like other bookstores. However, a relatively wide range of books could be seen as the books were donated from various places.

The selected place also played an important role for this activity because it allowed the BORA members to think and conduct ethical consumption while joining the reading club activity. The place was one of the branches of second-hand bookshops run by ‘The Beautiful Store’, which was the first registered social enterprise in South Korea (see details in section 1.4.1). All the books in this place were donated. The BORA members could have conducted the reading activity in any other places such as book cafes, libraries, book shops or even parks, etc. However, the BORA chose to do it in a used-book store because it gave them the opportunity to visit a second-hand bookshop and experience the value of second-hand culture. They could bring some books from their houses and donate them to the bookstore. This meant that the BORA members could join in donating unnecessary books or they could exchange books among the members like the sharing party they conducted.
Moreover, second-hand books and second-hand bookshops contained particular meanings and values which structured a particular consumer culture. As briefly discussed above, second-hand consumption let consumers be involved in acquiring and sharing memories of objects. People sometimes found pleasure by having vintage objects and the embedded memories. Like the people who enjoyed spending time in the dusty, damp or dismal surroundings of second-hand bookshops (Dalrymple, 2012), the BORA members enjoyed having a gathering at a second-hand bookstore. Some people who hated second-hand books and did not understand the value of second-hand consumption like Newkey-Burden (2008) would never join this kind of activity. However the BORA members found a value of second-hand consumption not just because it was part of ethical consumption, but because it became part of their culture. This raises an issue of the role of place because the choice of a particular place accommodates a particular type of activities (Kates, 2002; Chatzidakis et al., 2012). A further discussion about the role of place, which also can be described as ‘space’, will be made in the next section 4.5.

4.4.4 Summary and implications

The BORA was composed of the like-minded people who not only had an interest in ethical consumption, but also were eager to put their interest into practice. The BORA members gathered and constructed a social group in order to share and learn the way of living in an ethical manner. They created and conducted their own ethical consumption practices at a collective level, and these activities allowed them to interact with each other, holding the group identity.

The case of the sharing party was a manifest example of the group level activities. It was similar to a second-hand market including the gifting and sharing system. Each member brought their personal belongings which were unnecessary anymore. Those who didn’t have anything to bring could come empty-handed. Then, other members freely took or exchanged them with other items the other members brought. The activity was easy and simple but it enabled the BORA members to think about the importance of second-hand consumption. It offered them an opportunity to find and
organise unnecessary items which were held in storage for some time. From this activity, the BORA members actually could re-think the issue of purchasing new items, and they could find an alternative option: second-hand consumption. Unnecessary items for someone could be valuable ones for others. By sharing and exchanging the items among the BORA members, they also shared and talked about the memories or the stories of the items.

The case of the used-book reading club was also an example of ethical consumption practices conducted at a group level. Reading is normally considered to be a very personal activity. However, the BORA members regularly gathered in a place and read books altogether. Here, the choice of the place to gather was an important issue. Rather than choosing book cafes or libraries, the BORA members chose to meet at a second-hand bookshop because the place enabled them to conduct both ethical consumption and production. They could purchase used books and at the same time, they also could bring their own books to donate or to exchange them with other used books.

The BORA’s activities demonstrate the importance of conducting ethical consumption activities at a collective level. The BORA members co-learn and diffuse the ethos and values of ethical consumption through their collective activities. As the social aspects of consumption have been mostly neglected in an understanding of ethical consumption, this will be further explored in the discussion chapter.
4.5 Subtle cues: Possessing inside knowledge/inconspicuousness

4.5.1 Introduction

Consumption as part of consumer culture becomes a meaning-based activity in which goods and services construct and maintain identity (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998b). In other words, people do not consume merely for functional reasons, but the consumers are engaged in a symbolic project that brings cultural practices with cultural capital or symbolic materials (Adkins and Lury, 1999; Elliott and Davies, 2006). Possessions and behaviours can act as signals of identity (Veblen, 1899; Goffman, 1969; Douglas and Isherwood, 1996; Berger and Heath, 2007). In other words, the material goods individuals have and the ways of using them play a role as a tool of interpersonal interaction (Berger and Ward, 2010). This represents a socio-cultural perspective on consumption that puts emphasis on understanding the meanings and the roles of consumption practices.

The BORA members created and conducted a variety of ethical consumption practices not only at an individual level but also at a collective level. It contained the processes of sharing their experiences with other members and it offered the BORA members an opportunity to learn and acknowledge a new aspect of ethical consumption. The BORA’s activities played an important role in that their activities were a reflection of the BORA members’ ethical ethos and beliefs. Moreover they acted on interpersonal interaction among the group members that ultimately connected the BORA members together.

This section 4.5 explores how the BORA members construct networks among the group members through their own consumption practices. In particular the values and interpretations of ethical consumption in which the BORA members commonly pursue and share are investigated. This is because their activities can be interpreted in various ways; for instance, a participation of voluntary service not only presents an eager intention to help others but also implies one’s way of building a career. Thus, focusing on how the BORA members understand and interpret the meanings of their ethical
consumption activities is of great importance in understanding the BORA’s point of view. This helps us understand the BORA members’ own social world as well.

4.5.2 The meaning of re-usable items

The BORA members developed and conducted their own ethical ways of consumption practices in their daily lives. At the same time, they focused on the aspect of ‘not’ consuming particular goods and services, for instance, reducing the amount of purchasing new items via a sharing party, and bringing their own tumblers in order not to use disposable goods. Through these experiences, the BORA members shared the ethos and beliefs of ethical consumption, and it played a role in building networks within the group. The example of using re-usable cups discussed in section 4.3 was crucial not only because it showed a clear example of the micro-practices of ethical consumption, but also because it contained a role of interactive teaching, learning and communicating tool among the BORA members. The BORA members believed that using re-usable cups was one of the easiest and simplest ethical behaviours everyone could do in any place. However this simple act contained a number of meanings such as reduction or minimisation of the use of disposable goods. This practice was hardly noticed by others because it was subtly conducted. This section deals with subtle cues.

I as a researcher and an outsider didn’t even notice the fact that the BORA members intentionally used re-usable cups in order to avoid using disposable goods. This is similar to the phenomenon that most adults cannot distinguish the dress style of a British hipster subculture, the Mods, from typical office workers. This is because the Mods actually focus on maintaining subtle markers that only people who have the right cultural capital can notice, for instance, making the exact shape of their shoes or angle of their collar (Hebdige, 1979) (see details in section 2.3.3.3). Likewise, most of the new BORA members didn’t notice the aspect of using re-usable cups and they didn’t know that it was part of ethical consumption. A new BORA member said,

“While joining the BORA activities, I think I learn ethical consumption in greater detail. No, I mean I learn something new. I didn’t know that small practices in
daily lives such as taking out electric codes and reducing water consumption, etc. also could be ethical consumption. Now I understand that ethical consumption is closely connected to my daily lives. In these days, I bring my own spoon and chopsticks. Hyun-Soo Sung (Group 3 member) lets me know that using one’s own spoon and chopsticks can reduce using disposable utensils. My friends who don’t know about ethical consumption criticise that washing your own spoon and chopsticks also requires the consumption of water and cleanser. Yes, I know what she talks about. You know but it is about relativity. Abandoning disposable utensils is much worse than using a small amount of water and cleanser. Plastic spoons, vinyl covered spoons...all these things.” (Yoo-Joo Won)

Won said that her view towards ethical consumption had become more widely broadened than before. She now understands that small practices in daily lives can be part of ethical consumption. She was influenced by one of the previous group members, Hyun-Soo Sung, who was more conversant with the field of ethical consumption. Sung actively revealed her thoughts and ethos regarding ethical consumption, and other members learned and shared her ethical behaviours. Sung explained how she started to bring her own spoon and chopsticks:

“You know I always bring my tumbler, spoon and chopsticks. When I had a part-time job, I had to stay at the office whole day. As I had to order lunch every day, I found that I used too many disposable items. I am a member of an ethically conscious consumer group and it is contradictory to do unethical behaviours in a continuous manner. Thus, I try to bring my own utensils even though it is a bit troublesome work.” (Hyun-Soo Sung)

Using re-usable items is not a perfect form of ethical consumption because it still brings some unethical issues, for instance, using re-usable spoons involves the consumption of water and cleanser. However, as most Koreans use utensils whenever they have a meal, bringing and using one’s own utensils is a better option one can do within the contextual constraints. In other words, they choose a compromised and negotiated form of ethical consumption because a perfect form of ethical consumption is not feasible.
In relation to this, one of the new BORA members talked about simple acts of ethical consumption based on what she read in a magazine. Ma-Ru Lee was a magazine editor and had a similar experience talked about the inconspicuous cues existing in Green Korea United (GKU). The editor who didn’t know about eco-life visited the GKU office, and wrote a field note based on the question of “What would be the environmentalist group GKU’s lifestyle?”

“When I looked around desks, there were mugs and tumblers on each desk. Right, this is the office of GKU...but I found one disposable cup on a desk. It was not a big deal in other places but it was quite strange to see a paper cup in this office. The owner of the paper cup, green activist, Soo-Ji Kim said, to her embarrassment, “I brought the cup when I had a meeting at a café. In this office, we don’t use disposable products because abandoning disposable goods is actually a troublesome work.” I couldn’t understand why abandoning was annoying. However, I found an answer. There was no personal trash bin in this office. Instead, there were segregated garbage collection boxes next to the copy machine on the 2nd floor. At that moment, I came up with a question that ‘why do we hire people to clean the office?’ If we need to clean the place by ourselves, we may do not make a lot of trash...” (Ma-Ru Lee)

As the field note showed, the use of mugs was taken for granted in this place so having a paper cup was rather strange even though it could be very normal in other places. By simply removing personal trash bins, it allowed people to reduce producing trash and change their habits. People who didn’t know about the story behind using re-usable cups might not notice the fact that people in this office intentionally brought their own mugs. The use of re-usable cups was a kind of inconspicuous signal which took a role to construct the eco-friendly lifestyle and signify the identity shared and held by the organisation members. In other words, it was an inconspicuous in-group marker which only group members recognise and share as an insider, so outsiders might miss them (see McCracken’s [1988a] discussion of ‘invisible ink’).

---

5 GKU is an organisation which has taken actions for the Beautiful Planet, the Earth with the Earth People by questioning the distorted assumptions embedded in a modern society since 1991 (GKU, 2000).
Likewise, the use of re-usable items was an inconspicuous signal for the BORA members which could hardly be noticed by others. Some people might purchase Fair Trade coffees in order to present themselves as ethically conscious consumers. However the BORA members considered the aspect of purchasing Fair Trade coffees as a kind of explicit marker. As for the BORA members, a more important factor of ethical consumption was not in purchasing ethically produced goods, but in ordering coffee in a re-usable cup because this could be done in any situation, even in a place where Fair Trade coffees were not available. It seemed a very subtle and trifling matter, but it was considered to be the core value of ethical consumption for the BORA members.

4.5.3 Fashion style: The choice of a particular item accommodates a particular lifestyle

Sharing subtle signals with the group was also found in the choice of products. Even though purchasing products was not remarkably an important question of ethical consumption to the BORA members, they couldn’t completely avoid purchasing new products. Whenever they had to buy something, the aspect of ethically produced was firstly considered. One day, a BORA member wore ethically produced shoes and talked about her purchasing experience. She said that she spent quite a lot of time researching and finding ethically produced footwear and ethical shoes brands. She compared three to four ethical brands and finally bought one with an ethical brand name of ‘Civic Duty’:

“The previous group members introduced the brand ‘Civic Duty’ to me so I got an interest in it. The shoes are made with tybek material which is used as package paper by Fedex. Thus it is also called ‘paper shoes’. This material is very strong and firm so it can be used as construction material. Moreover, as it has a function of waterproof and ventilation, it is still wearable when raining. The products are made with the environmentally-friendly glue and the shoe boxes are made with recycling materials. Moreover, the firm annually chooses one item/model and donates all profits made from selling the item. The shoes look like Converse shoes so the design is not bad. There are not many places which sell civic duty shoes and
I find one store in Myung-Dong, Seoul. However, when I visited the store again few days ago, it was closed so the shoes could only be purchased from the online store in these days.” (Hyun-Soo Sung)

The excerpt was the diary written by Sung, explaining how she knew about the brand and the process of how she bought a particular pair of shoes. She also introduced several ethically produced shoe makers and other BORA members learned and shared the information about the shoes and her experience of purchasing ethically produced goods.

**Picture 8 Ethically produced shoes from the ethical brand ‘Civic Duty’**
They look like the shoes from Converse which is a high street fashion brand. However, the materials used in the shoes are ethically considered. The surface of the shoes shows that the shoes are mainly made by waterproof paper. Moreover, the rubbers used are recyclable as the tag shows.

**Picture 9 Shoes from a popular commercial shoe brand ‘Converse’**
The Converse shoes have similar features to the civic duty shoes. However the materials used are different from the ethically produced goods. This kind of mass produced goods could be stigmatised as ‘unethical’ or ‘non-ethical’. For instance Converse which has been a subsidiary of Nike, Inc. admitted ethical problems at a Nike Converse factory in Indonesia (Ethical Consumer, 2011b).
When I saw her shoes, I didn’t notice any particular features of ethically produced goods because the design was almost the same as the shoes from a popular commercial shoe brand ‘Converse’. The way the BORA members choose goods went along with what Simmel discovered. According to Frisby (1985, p. 62), Simmel tended to see modern fashion “as dialectic and ultimately a compromise between two tendencies: adherence to and absorption in a social group on the one hand, and individual differentiation and distinction from group members on the other.” They not only focused on making a distinction from others by choosing ethically produced goods made from particular ethical materials, but also adhering to the dominant culture, pursuing the popularly accepted designs in their choices. This was totally different from what I expected because I had a stereotype that ethically produced goods might have unique or unfashionable designs which were far from the mainstream designs. Moreover, as I didn’t know about the ethical shoe brands or ethically produced shoes, I couldn’t even think of what to consider when purchasing them such as the materials of the shoes or particular places to buy them. However, the BORA members continually talked about this kind of personal buying experience and shared information regarding ethical purchasing; for instance, ethical products or brands normally were not located on the main shopping thoroughfare so it would be difficult for the uninitiated to geographically locate. This kind of aspect played a role in distinguishing between ethically produced goods and non-ethical goods, accommodating an inconspicuous signal which outsiders would hardly notice. It was only shared and learned among the BORA members as inside knowledge. One of Group 4’s members was influenced by Sung who purchased ethically produced shoes, and bought ethically produced shoes as

6 www.converse.co.uk
well:

“I was planning to buy a new pair of shoes but I didn’t want to buy ones from Nike or other mass produced goods this time. Actually I felt guilty to buy them. I might buy mass produced goods or non-ethical goods for the items that I frequently purchased such as T-shirts or socks. However, shoes were not the items frequently purchasable so I wanted to focus on buying something ethical at this time. I had no idea what to buy for a while, but when I saw Sung’s shoes and heard about the shoes, I just decided to buy them.” (So-Yeol Park)

Park’s choice of purchasing ethically produced goods was influenced by Sung’s purchase. Park also had a desire to share her experience of purchasing and using ethically produced goods with other group members. This was because even though both Sung and Park had the same experience of buying and using the ethically produced goods, they had slightly different motivations, feelings, and thoughts about them:

“I, as the BORA member, strongly encouraged people to practise ethical consumption so I thought that I had to practise ethical consumption first. Think about the situation that I recommend my friends to buy some ethically produced goods but I don’t actually have any ethically produced goods. In that case, I cannot explain the benefits or negative aspects of the goods that I recommend (...) I think the shoes that I bought are ethically produced so this is a valuable aspect of the shoes. However when I actually wear them, I don’t think they are more comfortable compared with other mass produced goods. The back of the shoes is quite low so the shoes are taken off my feet easily. And the details of the shoes are a bit shoddy, compared to the Nike shoes that I have. The quality of the shoes is honestly not very good.” (So-Yeol Park)

Park had a quite negative feeling after she actually used the item. She honestly talked about some problems of the products which were not mentioned by Sung. The case of civic duty shoes shows that the BORA members interact with each other by sharing
their experiences, and they share a particular value which can hardly be found by outsiders.

Secondly, the BORA members’ choices of particular items implied ethical meanings. All the BORA members always attended events in casual and comfortable dress so a ‘house’ fashion style was evident in the group. For most Koreans of this age group, this ‘house’ fashion style of dress is unusual due to the influence of tempting luxury brands and fashionable accessories. Kantor (2014) from The New York Times also described the Korean society as a society with ‘an enthusiasm of the beauty culture’. One participant noted how her dress style changed when joining the BORA with an explanation about how it impacted on her behaviour:

“I usually wore high heels in the past. However, when I got involved in the BORA, I had a chance to think about this. When I made an ethical consumption promotion film which was one of my team’s activities, I came up with the differences between high heels and sneakers. When I wore high heels, I always tried to find elevators and take a taxi. I didn’t recognize this at first but I noticed that wearing high heels called for other resources. However, when I started to wear sneakers, I didn’t take elevators but used stairs. I walked a lot. When I was late for church, I rather wore sneakers and ran. This kind of change also affected my lifestyle, and I thought that it could be part of ethical consumption in some ways.” (Yoo-Jung Noh)

The choice of casual and comfortable dress or items was both a demonstration of belongings but it also enabled members to adhere to the values of the organisation. In the example above, the change from high heels to comfort shoes was not simply a change in the appearance of the self, but it also impacted on the way which the individual behaved. Noh demonstrated that she was able to be more self-sufficient and mobile in the city, accommodating an ethical lifestyle; one which was less dependent on fossil energy. The implication here is that the choice of particular items accommodates particular lifestyles. Wearing high heels or other uncomfortable shoes obviously makes the wearer easily feel tired so it is evident that the dependence on transportations increases. However by putting an effort to choose comfortable shoes,
the wearer gets more chance not to rely on the use of transportation, but to focus more on ethical lifestyles such as walking or riding a bicycle. This is also connected to the importance of considering personal sacrifice and individual effort (see details in section 4.3.2) in conducting ethical consumption.

Then it is questionable whether the choice of unethically produced comfortable shoes is better than the choice of ethically produced high heels. For instance, one may purchase a pair of Nike trainers which contain various unethical issues such as sweatshop problems or the use of animal skin, and he/she adopts an ethical lifestyle. Another person purchases a pair of ethically produced high heels. Even though this person adopts relatively unethical behaviours in her lifestyle due to the choice of high heels, she still may consider herself as an ethically conscious consumer because she buys an ethically produced product. It is hard to estimate and judge the value of ethical consumption in this kind of case but the BORA members set a high value on something they can do in a continual manner. As previously mentioned, the BORA members face some situations to purchase unethical products, for instance when they meet their friends who are not interested in ethical consumption at all, they sometimes have to follow their purchasing behaviours. The BORA members cannot push them to purchase ethically produced goods. Moreover purchasing ethically produced goods requires the buyers to have a certain level of information about the availability and financial assets to afford them. In this vein, the BORA members cannot completely ignore purchases of non- or unethical products in the marketplaces. Of course, the best option the BORA members can take is to purchase ethically produced goods and to use them in an ethical manner which constructs ethical lifestyles. However they believe that this is a rather superficial so they try to find and conduct the negotiated and compromised forms of ethical consumption.

To synthesise, the choice of particular items leads the BORA members to behave and perform in particular ethical ways. Here, the choice of particular items is a conspicuous feature but the use of them plays a role of subtle signals, namely inconspicuousness. Rather than focusing on explicit markers on ethically produced goods such as the logo of ethical brands or the certification symbol, the BORA members focus on the aspect of
simply altering the choice of high heels to comfortable shoes. Wearing comfortable shoes enables the wearer to expose to ethical lifestyles, and this remains a subtle value which is hardly noticed and appreciated by others.

4.5.4 Space: transformation of the ordinary coffee shop to the social world of ethical consumption

Subtle cues are not just embedded in the choice of particular products, but also are permeated in particular places. A certain place has a particular role to play and it has a unique feature which constructs the atmosphere of the place. For instance, church has certain functions to serve such as allowing visitors to pray, listen to preach and have social gatherings. Church has a pious, calm and quiet atmosphere so the visitors can spontaneously understand and achieve these purposes in this particular space. In other words, the space of church contains the religious value, especially the identity of Christianity. In this vein, place is not simply a static location where people meet, but it is a meaningful entity in which a particular value and identity is embedded.

The BORA members also put a particular emphasis on the places they chose to visit. They focused on finding and using places which they believed were ethical. The BORA members had favourite cafes or restaurants which had common features. They all were local, small, vintage and non-branded places in the back-streets, holding some unique interior designs and pursuing ethical values rather than focusing on maximising profits. The BORA members argued that when they visited franchised stores or branded cafes, they were not familiar with the features the branded stores had, such as splendid and fancy but fixed form of interior designs, no interactions with the staff members or other customers, and too much of an organised and cleaned atmosphere, etc. However whenever they visited their accustomed cafes, they felt more comfortable. This was not because they had a particular taste of café design, but because they found that the similar identity with so called the ‘BORA-dentity’ was embedded in these spaces. As people transform space into place by adding meaning and significance to it (Tuan, 1977; Harvey, 1989; Lofland, 1998; Gieryn, 2000), the space the BORA chooses becomes full of ethical consumption identity. In other words, the BORA’s choice of
particular spaces constructs a kind of physical boundary which can make a distinction from the outside. Then, exploring the flow and dynamics of events held in particular places is of great importance to understand what people are doing, thinking, behaving, and feeling as well as the static and fixed conditions (Dewey and Bentley, 1949).

The BORA chose a place called ‘Café Che-Hwa-Dang (CHD)’ for the new group’s (Group 4) first day orientation activities. The reason why they chose this particular place was to show their identity to the new members by gathering in a particular place which became part of their inseparable lived experiences (Low and Altman, 1992). Waxman (2006) also argues that the experience of place is unique to each individual and it is directly related to his or her lived experiences. The BORA members believed that the chosen place was the right place not only to conduct their activities, but also to show their identities.

To further explain this, three components of the place; the physical characteristics, the identities of the place, and the characteristics of customers/patrons were considered crucial. The reasons for this are as follows; first of all, the characteristics of the physical evidence not only show the atmosphere of the place, but also reflect the tastes and interests of the owner (e.g. Chatzidakis et al.’s (2012) description about the space). Second, the identities of the place have to fit with the activities the visitors plan to conduct otherwise unexpected conflicts can occur. For instance, you cannot play a computer game at a computer science lab. Most places covertly or overtly have rules, regulations, policies or customs the visitors should follow, and they construct the identities of the place. Third, in relation to this, customers or patrons who visit the place may understand and agree with the identities of the place. In this vein, understanding the characteristics of customers in the place is of great importance to fully understand the identities of the place.

4.5.4.1 The BORA’s choice of place at a group level

CHD is a locally owned coffee shop in a flourishing area but located in a back-street. As it is a bit far from major roads and is located in the middle of an alley in a
residential street, people normally visit the shop by chance or by the word-of-mouth. This place was an ordinary house in the past, but it has changed into a book cafe. As the coffee shop exterior looks like a house, it is easy for people to pass by without noticing.

**Picture 10 The entrance of CHD**

It has no front gate so it is open to everyone. The exterior of the place still remains in the original form which is an ordinary house. Thus, if there is no signboard, people may not recognise the place as a café.

The place has no front gate so it looks open to everyone. In front of CHD, there are several Korean traditional stone craftworks which evoke a traditional and cosy atmosphere. As the exterior of this place looks more like the traditional Korean tea house rather than a café, there is a signboard which lets people know this place is a coffee shop. Unless you were ‘in the know’ or knowledgeable about the cues you could not recognise this as an entrance to a café. There is a kind of small front yard which can be used as parking spaces, but a valet parking service is not provided.

**Picture 11 The front place of CHD**

The signboard shows the name of the café. The front place of CHD is full of Korean traditional crocks of soy sauce, and some of them are used as ashtrays. The signboard and the crocks present the traditional image of the café which is quite different from the ordinary coffee shop images.

---

The signboard looks like a wooden-easel and the name of the coffee shop is engraved on it. Next to the signboard, there is a wooden bench which allows people to smoke. There are three huge Korean traditional crocks which are full of sand to be used as ashtrays. All these items compose a traditional Korean image and characteristic of the place. This is quite different from other coffee shops such as Starbucks. The item of coffee normally presents the image of Western culture but this place focuses on showing the Korean traditional image.

The inside of the overall atmosphere is warm because the yellow-painted walls and brown wooden furniture contribute to the character of the place. The items like craftworks, tables, chairs, sofas and two pianos are either donated by local residents or given as gifts by the visitors. Thus, all the furniture does not match with each other in terms of size, material and design but they make the place look like an antique house. Even though the actual size of the place is quite large, the place looks small because it is quite crowded with relatively big-sized furniture. Moreover, as this place is a book café, there are approximately 1000 books which play a role to decorate the place (see Picture 12). 20% of the books were donated by local residents and 80% of the books were from the owner of this place. Once or twice a month, some books are donated by patrons who work in large bookstores.

Picture 12 Bookstands in CHD

Various books ranging from historical and philosophical books to the contemporary best sellers are displayed at the coffee shop. Any visitors can freely take books from this bookshelf and read at the coffee shop.

http://www.travelnews.kr/sub/DcoView.html?Page_ID=14&mode=view&BID=396&CPage=1
In the right-hand corner, the counter is located with a small open kitchen. As customers usually eat here rather than taking beverages or foods away, they rarely use any disposable products such as paper or plastic cups. On the right side of the counter, there are stairs which are connected to the ground floor. The ground floor can be used as the event room.

**Picture 13 The ground floor of CHD**

A group of people can book the place in advance and they can use it. As there are various types of lights in a large space (if removing tables and chairs), some indie bands conduct music performances. Some people do lectures and some play documentary films or indie movies. The BORA also uses this place when they launch their new group orientation programme.
The name of this place has the meaning of the pursuit of harmony. The name ‘Che-Hwa-Dang’ is from the Korean relic which has the meaning of brotherliness. Like the meaning of the name, this place becomes the hub of the cultural place in the local community. The way of using humble, old, and vintage wooden furniture or subtle decorations creates a comfortable and warm atmosphere so the visitors feel comfortable and relaxed when they stay in this place (see Picture 14). There are numerous coffee shops which pursue the vintage aesthetics of decoration by intentionally displaying antique (styled) furniture. In other words some coffee shops use a set of furniture which seems to be old and vintage but they are actually not old or worn-out. They even display some luxurious furniture which has vintage and antique design. However the place of CHD was different from these coffee shops in terms of collecting and displaying furniture abandoned or worn-out but still usable. As each piece of furniture was collected from different places, the lack of consistency in the design of furniture was noticeable.

Picture 14 Furniture and interior design of CHD

Vintage wooden bookshelves, casual props such as picture frames or signboard and some other colourful furniture like red chair or blue table are not incoherent but they match with yellow-painted walls and produce its own style of this place.

This place supports a number of local activities and crucially considers the ethical values in its business. For example, this book café offers Fair Trade coffee from East Timor, purchases ingredients of the foods from YMCA organic market, and shows

relevant documentary films such as Black Gold\textsuperscript{12}. Moreover, if customers bring their own mugs or tumblers, drinks are offered at a reduced price. As previously mentioned, all the furniture and the books were recycled, re-used and donated. This could be a way of reducing the running cost of the café rather than the way of pursuing ethical values. However, the overall ethos of the place from the items used to the products and services offered demonstrates that the owner of this place attempts to make every effort to conduct ethical consumption and production. The place also holds an ethos of pursuing the community spirit and grass-roots democracy, and it ultimately attempts to build a harmonious relationship between the customer and the owner. This will be further explained in the following section in relation to the characteristics of the customers in this place.

Kim (2014) who is a reporter of the travel news introduces the place of CHD, and describes the characteristics of the customers; most of the patrons in this place are people who are not a big fan of modern, fancy, splendid or luxurious places. They are not interested in big brand names or professional services as well. They feel uncomfortable when visiting the global franchise coffee shops such as Starbucks because franchises offer the same products and services to all customers so there is lack of uniqueness. Moreover, there is no human interaction between the customer and the staff member in places like Starbucks. The conversation between the customer and the staff member ends when the ordering is made. Another feature is that the place of CHD allows the customers to stay as long as they want. It is known that most of the book cafes in Korea have a kind of rule that each customer has to order at least one drink, and he/she can stay there only for 3 hours.

The analysis of the place the BORA chose at a group level showed the BORA’s characteristics and identities which turned out to be clearly different from other coffee shops. The most distinctive feature of this place was to pursue ethical values, presenting them in both a conspicuous and inconspicuous manner. Some of the ethical values were

\textsuperscript{12} ‘Black Gold’ is a documentary film which deals with the issue of Fair Trade in the coffee retail business. As the enormous power of the multinational players dominates the world's coffee trade becomes apparent, this film reveals many challenges a myriad of coffee farmers face and attempts to find a long term solution for them (http://blackgoldmovie.com/story, 2014).
reflected and presented in a subtly visible way, for example, displaying used furniture or offering organic produce. The BORA members also recognised and accepted these kinds of subtle signals which the place pursued so they could conduct their ethical activities in this place:

“It was quite hard for me to find the place but I felt that it was totally like the BORA. Compared with franchised coffee shops which were strictly organised, it seemed very open to everyone and I felt it like a backyard of my friend’s house.” (Ki-A Choo)

“...I felt that the place seemed to be connected with ethical consumption. The ground floor was composed of real trees and it seemed eco-friendly place with warm lights...” (Sook-Yeon Lee)

Most of the BORA members felt that the place had characteristics similar to the BORA’s. This was because the owner of the place had an ethos to support ethical consumption in daily lives so the value of ethical consumption was embedded in the place. Low (1992, p. 165) stated, “place attachment is the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual’s and group’s understanding of and relation to the environment.” As Relph (1976) believed that to be inside a place is to belong and identify with it, the BORA members might recognise and accept the ethical values in this particular place. The place also enabled the BORA members to conduct diverse types of ethical consumption-related activities which could be found in daily lives such as using mugs or bringing tumblers. This was not the only case of the BORA’s choice of place at a group level. Interestingly, it was also seen from an individual participant’s choice of place for the interview.

4.5.4.2 An individual BORA member’s choice of place

When the BORA members had an individual interview, they had to choose the interview place. All BORA members chose a coffee shop for the interview. Basically
when each member selected a coffee shop, he/she let me know the place and time, and we met at the selected place. Some members had particular tastes of choosing coffee shops.

I particularly remembered one interview place because this place was hidden inside the alleys so it was hard for me to find. The member, Ba-Ram Jung asked me to meet at the Hae-Ki station which was near to the Kyung-Hee University in the northern part of Seoul. She said that the coffee shop which she chose was hard to find for the newcomers. Moreover, among the Kyung-Hee University students, only a few knew about this place but they were loyal patrons. When I walked with her to go to the coffee shop, I entered several different alleys and it was very complicated so I was afraid and worried about having to go back to my place alone after the interview. Walking about 25 minutes from the station, we finally arrived at the coffee shop.

**Picture 15 The entrance of ‘Half-warehouse’**

It showed its unique ambiance and the identity of this place. It was a local small coffee shop. This was the only place which an outer wall was made with wood. Moreover, the place was painted by the owner, not by an employed painter so it seemed quite immature and was far from perfection. However, the overall atmosphere was natural and casual.

The coffee shop was in the middle of a small alley and there were several local restaurants next to it. There were no parking spaces for customers and in front of the front door, the ‘NO PARKING’ sign was written on a yellow wooden notice board. The notice board was painted in yellow and the sign letters were hand written with pink paints. Another notice blackboard was displayed on the right side of the front door. The
opening time and the phrase ‘Save the earth’ was written with chalk. The exterior of the coffee shop was composed of wooden blocks painted in white, and a small signboard of modern design was put on top of the front door. The pictures of drinks were put on the exterior wall of the coffee shop. The front door was very small so only one person could get in at one time. As the front door was painted in yellow, it was easily noticed.

As the name of this coffee shop ‘Half-warehouse’ showed, the coffee shop was in the middle of the first floor and the ground floor. The inner door was located four steps below. The ceiling was very low so people should crouch when walking down the stairs. The inner door was made of a brown wooden material. When getting inside the inner door, there was a small but cozy and neat café. There were only five tables and all of them seemed different from each other. However, they all were made of woods in modern design so they looked harmonious. Four tables were meant for customers who had company and one was for an individual customer. Some advertisements for small-scale performances or dramas were stuck on the wall. The ceiling was very low so even though there were only two lights, the whole café was bright. Moreover, the sunbeams shining through the big windows near the front door made the place brighter as well.

**Picture 16 Individual customer’s space in the café**

This table was for an individual customer who normally wanted to study or read books in a quiet place with drinks. This place was located in the inside corner of the coffee shop so other customers in other tables might rarely notice this place.

The desk for an individual customer was small and adhered to the wall so the customer didn’t have to mind other people. This space was more like a study room so it was
perfect for the customer who wanted to spend time alone. On the desk, small props such as a little calendar, a little doll and a small desk lamp were provided.

**Picture 17 A flea market in the cafe**
There was a flea market in the coffee shop so this led customers to have bartering experiences. I believed that this was one part of ethical consumption because it enables the customers to reduce waste and unnecessary purchasing.

Three to four flowerpots were placed among the tables and they seemed to be presenting eco-friendly atmosphere. Next to the front door, there was a basket placed on the chair. Several items such as small books, pencils, a mirror, seeds, etc. were in the basket. It was a kind of flea market so anyone who would like to take the items from the basket could take for free. These were donated by visitors because they thought that they didn’t need them but someone might want to have them. This basket was located behind of the front door so the customers who entered the coffee shop couldn’t notice it. Thus, the entering customers wouldn’t notice it, but the leaving customers would notice it, and this led the customers to take the items without any burden.

**Picture 18 ‘Save the cup, Save the earth’**
This blackboard encouraged customers to use tumblers by offering a discount. The owner showed the motivation for ethical consumption in a humorous way, saying, “Special order! Save the Earth!”
Inside the coffee shop, there was a counter with an open kitchen so customers ordering drinks could see how the drinks were made. Next to the counter, there was a big blackboard and the owner of this place wrote a message on it, which presented an identity of this coffee shop (see Picture 18). It said, “Save the cup, Save the earth.” If customers brought their own tumblers, they could have a discount of 25-50p for to go. Moreover, on the tenth visit, these tumbler users could have a free drink. There was statistics displayed about the number of people who brought their own tumblers (in other words, ‘people who saved the Earth’) per week, per month and per year.

The owner of this coffee shop pursued ethical values in her business. This aspect was conspicuously perceived, for example, all the menus from coffee to cakes were made from organic produce. Moreover, all the dessert menus were made by the owner with no butter, no egg and no milk. As the message ‘Save the earth’ was displayed in the middle of the coffee shop, it showed that the coffee shop particularly pursued the value of environmentally-friendliness.

The pursuit of ethical values was inconspicuously perceived as well. When I ordered a cup of coffee, it was served in mugs even though I didn’t ask. Other coffee shops, especially franchised coffee shops normally offered beverages in paper or plastic cups if customers did not ask for mugs. The coffee shop also encouraged customers to use tumblers by offering a discount off the regular price. Making a little flea market was
meant to make people not abandon unused goods. By employing a barter system, people who had unused items could donate them, and others who needed them didn’t have to buy new goods. Thus no one had to pay. It was a place of exchange (market) with no financial transaction. Unused items for someone could be revived by being reused by someone else who needed them. All these features subtly showed that the coffee shop put emphasis on ethical values.

As this coffee shop was located hidden in a small alley, customers who were familiar with this area might visit this place. Moreover, the coffee shop was located in an area of the university, and so university students were the dominant customers. As the place was small, quiet and located in a hidden area, a lot of customers visited this place alone. Thus, this place was suitable for individual customers rather than for a social gathering. Moreover, patrons seemed to understand and accept the owner’s pursuit of ethical values. They also seemed to understand the subtle rules in this coffee shop such as the benefits of using tumblers or running a small flea market. I observed that when a patron ordered a cup of coffee, this person brought her own tumbler and had a short conversation about the loyalty card with the owner. This person used her tumbler for ten times at this coffee shop so she could have a free drink next time. She knew that the use of her tumbler in this coffee shop was not only beneficial to herself but also good to the society in terms of doing ethical consumption. She also knew about the little flea market in this coffee shop so she rummaged the little basket out. I, as a new customer of this coffee shop, wouldn’t have noticed these kinds of rules unless the interviewee had told me about the rules in detail.

From the analyses of the places the BORA members chose, the construction and presentation of identities of the BORA are discussed. It demonstrates that the chosen place accommodates particular types of behaviours and activities which are regarded as ethical consumption practices. Within a particular place, the BORA members show what they think, believe, behave and feel which ultimately construct who they are. In this way, the BORA creates an ethical space through the transformation of the marketplace. In here, the role of place should not be ignored because it, as a subtle signal, makes an influence to the social construction of ethical consumption.
4.5.5 Summary and implications

The BORA members showed a variety of consumption activities which were not only motivated by their needs and wants, but also were engaged in a symbolic project that showed their identities. In particular, the BORA members used their consumption practices as a communication tool among the group members, creating and understanding particular values and meanings.

The BORA members put an extensive emphasis on the value of the micro-practices of ethical consumption in daily lives. By conducting small activities both at the individual and group level, the BORA members learned and shared the ethos and beliefs of ethical consumption. The use of re-usable items in their daily lives was one of the examples. When the BORA members visited coffee shops, they intentionally asked the staff members to offer their drinks in mugs. Some members brought their own tumblers and they tried to make this act habitual. As for the BORA members, using re-usable items became a taken-for-granted habit because it was an easy and simple ethical behaviour which could be done by anyone in any situation.

Bringing their spoon and chopsticks was also another form of ethical behaviour. The use of utensils was hardly be noticed by others because it is not a crucial matter. However the BORA members picked up this small part of everyday practices, subtly presenting the value of ethical consumption. Rather than finding the ways of doing something ethical, the BORA members put a value on not doing something unethical first. This kind of ethical consumption activities functioned as subtle signals which enabled the BORA members to learn and share the ethos and beliefs of ethical consumption. These signals also played a role in communicating and interacting among the BORA members that ultimately built a group network and remained as a group culture.

The example of purchasing ethically produced shoes also contained the subtle signals which others might not notice or understand. The shoes looked similar to other mass produced trainers but the ethical values of the shoes were subtly presented and they
were embedded in the choice of materials used in each part of the shoes. Moreover these shoes were only sold in a particular store. The BORA members learned and gained the information about the shoes by sharing one of the BORA member’s experiences of purchasing ethically produced shoes.

Finally, the BORA members noticed that the choice of particular items or places accommodated particular lifestyles or behaviours which remained as another type of inconspicuous cues. The BORA members found that the choice to wear comfortable shoes made an influence on their behaviours for instance, taking off high heels and wearing flat shoes helped them to walk rather than taking lifts, and they could have more chance to ride a bicycle rather than taking a taxi.

This kind of change was also seen in the choice of particular places. When the BORA members visited the places where ethical values were embedded, they were easily familiar with conducting ethical practices. This was similar with the case of subcultural places such as the places of punk music clubs where anyone could enjoy the punk culture surrounded with punk styles, decorations, events and music, etc. By exposing oneself to a particular place, one might think of or adopt a particular value and meaning that the place had. This raises an idea of the relationship between the space and identities. Moreover all these features are considered to be subtle signals because they are hardly noticed. A further investigation about the role of subtle signals within a group in relation to ethical consumption will be made in the discussion chapter.
Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The findings chapter offers an image of ethical consumption that is complex and understood in various ways. There are diverse interpretations of ethical consumption and the way of presenting ethical consumption is also multiple, exhibiting a variety of forms. Guido (2009) argues that an ethical consumer which can be described as ‘a very wide spectrum of person’ can express him or herself in various ways ranging from simply buying ethical products to more complex and committed behaviours like boycotting un-ethically produced goods. This thesis extends Guido’s (2009) understanding of ethical consumption to the everyday, to compromised or negotiated ethical consumption and to the context of place. Moreover ethical consumption includes the process of sharing and learning ethical ethos and belief at a collective level. These show that ethical consumption is not always defined solely by purchase but it can be defined and presented by various activities and meanings which are located in a socially constructed world.

This Chapter 5 discusses how the BORA members understand and interpret the concept of ethical consumption by exploring the meanings and values of their activities. By following each theme of the findings chapter in sequence, an interpretational discussion of the BORA’s ethical consumption practices will be made in relation to the previous studies and understanding of ethical consumption and ethical consumers literatures. From this, this thesis puts emphasis on investigating the complex nature of ethical consumption practices which go beyond the aspect of purchasing ethically produced goods.

5.2 The ethically conscious consumer

The BORA members present how they understand ethical consumption through their creation of activities which are the reflection of their understandings, beliefs and commitment about ethical consumption. One of the distinctive features of their views
toward ethical consumption is to take a different route from the existing knowledge of ethical consumption. They argue that it is necessary to critically think about the conventional understanding of ethical consumption which for them seems to mostly focus merely on buying ethically produced goods (see details in section 2.1.1). They reposition ethical consumption by putting it apart from ‘ethical buying’ and do not see ethical consumers as limited to ‘ethical purchasers’. The BORA members find that purchase is not the only way in which ethical consumption is to be understood and conducted. Consumers may not always purchase ethically produced goods due to financial difficulty or unavailability of ethically produced goods. They are often unable to simply purchase ethical products but importantly they actually consider buying as too easy (i.e. slacktivism in terms of spending little time or involvement) and not able to completely fulfil their concept of ethical consumption. It is superficial and it is not continuous. Pedersen (2013, p. 21) argues that sustainable consumption as part of ethical consumption in relation to buying behaviours has been seen as “a slightly elitist concept focusing on a limited consumer segment (willing and able to pay more).” In other words, only a limited number of people can be practically involved in ‘ethical buying behaviours’ but they also cannot continually purchase ethically produced goods. The BORA members claim that ethical consumption is much more complex than just buying ethically produced goods. For these reasons ethical consumption can be presented in various forms and it does not have to be limited to the purchasing event. The BORA members try to figure out any activities they do in their daily lives and find the meanings and values of ethical consumption from them. Their everyday activities and practices are seen as the micro-practices as noted by Ulver-Sneistrup et al. (2011). Ulver-Sneistrup et al. (2011) examine mundane consumption practices in order to investigate the paradox of ordinary consumers’ brand resistance and they find the importance of subtle kind of activism in the everyday which goes beyond overt political activism such as demonstrations or campaigns. The BORA members believe that very routine and familiar daily activities are valuable enough to be a consistent and a continual way of practising ethical consumption. This is because daily activities do not need excessive extra investment of time, money and resources in order to practise ethical consumption in daily lives. This view takes root in the BORA as an essential value of ethical consumption.
Like Dobscha and Ozanne’s (2001) study which focuses on trivial actions in daily lives such as never using dryers in the warmer months, the BORA members put a value on everyday occurrences which have easily been overlooked. This is supported by Gladwell (2000, pp. 166-167) who argues in his famous book The Tipping Point that even the smallest and subtlest and most unexpected factors can affect the way we act:

“There is a world of difference between being inclined toward violence and actually committing a violent act. A crime is a relatively rare and aberrant event. For a crime to be committed, something extra, something additional, has to happen to tip a troubled person toward violence, and what the power of context is saying is that those tipping points may be as simple and trivial as everyday signs of disorder like graffiti and fare-beating.”

What Gladwell (2000) argues is that a lot of serious crimes can be prevented in advance by paying attention to the simple and trivial facts which are easily overlooked. For example, specific and relatively small elements in the environment such as fixing broken windows, cleaning up graffiti or putting an extra lock on the door can remove the signals that invite crime in the first place. These serve as tipping points that play a fundamental role of developing a defence mechanism. Likewise, the micro-practices of ethical consumption in daily lives should not be ignored because they verify how an essential value of ethical consumption can be achieved. However, unlike Gladwell’s (2000) argument which is to add extra resources to reduce negative tipping points, the BORA members try to find the way to change negative tipping points into positive ones without adding extra resources. For example the BORA members intentionally chose to wear comfortable shoes such as sneakers rather than high heels because they could motivate themselves to walk or ride a bicycle in their daily lives. They realised that uncomfortable shoes made them more likely take transportations or lifts which could be considered to be negative tipping points.

One of the key articulations of the BORA is that in essence, nothing is truly ethical. Clark (2006, p. 23) argues, “if it’s ethical to, say, choose a car with lower greenhouse emissions, it must be even more ethical to walk instead of drive, to take the stairs rather
than the lift, or to only eat raw food to save wasting the energy used in cooking.” There is no perfect form of ethical consumption because there are no objective ethical standards. We just have our own specific ideas of what should and shouldn’t count as ‘ethical’. In line with this, the BORA also argues that there is no perfect standard or goal but there are daily activities that drive towards more ethical and avoid non-ethical. This calls for a discussion on the use of the term, ‘ethical consumer’. Marketing literature has commonly used the term ‘ethical consumer’ and it is described as those who consider various ethical issues such as the environment, human and/or animal welfare as important within their consumption lifestyles (e.g. Strong, 1997; Barnett et al., 2005a; Harrison et al., 2005). However, several researchers criticise the use of the term ‘ethical consumer’. Shaw and Riach (2011) argue that the notion of a ‘typical’ ethical consumer is hard to define because individual consumers’ practices may vary. McDonald et al. (2012) have empirically found that the majority of the self-selected green consumers in the study can be categorised as ‘greening’ rather than ‘green’. On the one hand, they all engaged in some forms of ethical activity, and on the other hand, their lives are engaged in some elements of ‘non-ethical’ or ‘unethical’ consumption (McDonald et al., 2012). Clark (2006) also claims that the term ‘ethical’ is often problematic and the aspect of subjectivity of the term should not be ignored as there is no perfect or definitive form. This implies that the notion of ‘ethical’ can be interpreted in various ways.

The BORA members were also found to doubt the existence of perfect or ideal ‘ethical’ consumers. They avoid using the term ‘ethical consumer’ and they rather call themselves ‘ethically conscious’ consumers because nobody achieves perfect ethical consumption. They believe that ethical consumption can never be perfectly achieved, but that people can become and be ethically conscious. In this vein, they focus on their everyday practices in order to continually enact ethical consumption. This does not mean that ethical consumption is entirely apart from the marketplace because nobody can live completely without the marketplace. This is contrary to the implicit dichotomy drawn by many scholars who examine ethical consumption behaviours in social isolation with mainstream consumerism (see, for example, Harrison et al., 2005). Like Shaw and Riach (2011), ethical consumption can be seen as consecutively constructed
both in opposition to, and within, marketplace encounters. As the BORA members’ own creation of activities such as the activities during the World Fair Trade festival and the sharing party (see details in section 4.2) show, they try to find the ethical values and meanings in their daily practices without leaving the marketplace. They rather choose to conduct negotiated and compromised forms of ethical consumption. The activity of making coin purses during the World Fair Trade festival is considered to be the compromised form of ethical consumption because the visitors cannot fully join in the production processes of coin purses. Since the materials used for making coin purses, namely milk packages and rubber bands are already produced from the marketplace and are not inherently ethical raw material, people in reality cannot participate in all the manufacturing systems. In this sense, consumers cannot live entirely apart from the marketplace because their lives are not self-sufficient but they just try to find something they can do in each situation. As for the BORA members, ethical consumption is the means rather than the end. They believe that ethical consumption is not static but it is a process of ‘constantly becoming’ through a continual learning and self-reflection. This view is in line with McDonald et al.’s (2012) discussion of ‘greening’ rather than ‘green’.

Exploring and understanding the BORA members’ interpretation of ethical consumption is of great importance because it illuminates, re-shapes and expands the definition of ethical consumption by integrating the previously theorised definitions of ethical consumption. Based on this expanded view towards ethical consumption, the specific elements that construct new dimensions of ethical consumption will be discussed and explored in the following sections.

5.3 Realistic-Idealist

The BORA members find the ethical values in mundane consumption accommodating their actual conducts of ethical practices in daily lives. O’Rourke (2006) also emphasises that the smallest actions such as buying Fair Trade tea or thinking of the everyday choices we make - when we shop, recycling more or conserving energy - still have ripple effects. In this way, the BORA members conduct their own activities which
reflect their ethos and this process builds their own social world which is sometimes seen as living apart from the dominant culture. It sometimes emerges as a form of consumer resistance in terms of positioning against the mainstream marketplace (Penaloza and Price, 1993) but one that does not bear the usual hallmarks of revolutionary potential. It is a form of negotiated and quiet resistance which is different from highly pronounced consumer resistance such as activist communities or specific brand antagonists or protagonists (Ulver-Sneistrup et al., 2011).

This bears some analogy with the cup noodles consumers: not all consumers who purchase a cup of noodles in the supermarket follow the instructions of the product recipe. Some consumers change the original recipe and develop their own recipe. These consumers are still in the mainstream marketplace but they are different from mainstream consumers by taking simple individual acts that transform purchase into production. In other words they conduct an act of singularisation in terms of crafting mass produced goods to a unique form and making a distinction from others. Likewise, the BORA members also remain in the marketplace but they invest time and effort in creating their own actions, thinking out the ways they can do ethical consumption. In this regard, Clark (2006) also emphasises the aspect of taking the time to learn a little about how your lifestyle affects people, the planet and animals, and making your own decisions about what constitutes an ethical or unethical purchase.

Along with this approach, the BORA members take a different route away from the mainstream culture and this can be considered to be a type of consumer resistance. Like Ulver-Sneistrup et al.’s (2011) study, the BORA presents consumer resistance through a sort of subtle kind of activism such as everyday-like consumer practice that is in line with micro-practices of ethical consumption. For instance, whenever they drink something, they try to use re-usable cups or their own tumblers in order not to use disposable cups. It seems like a trivial action but the BORA members find the ethical values in this kind of small actions and they actually put this idea into practice. It is usual for South Koreans to use disposable cups so the BORA members’ stubbornness to use re-usable cups is unique. Then, the meaning of consumer resistance in this thesis is closely connected to consumer creativity, establishing the BORA’s own identities and
ethos that are different from what we normally understand as follows: consumer resistance in relation to consumer culture has extensively dealt with the perspective of specific consumer movements and micro-cultures such as collectivities with a propensity to reproduce the inside/outside-the-marketplace opposition (e.g. Belk and Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2002a; Thompson, 2004; Cova and Pace, 2006; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Sandlin and Callahan, 2009; Luedicke et al., 2010; Moraes et al., 2010).

In the past, the traditional trait of resistance against such as revolutionary activism was the main concern of consumer resistance studies. For example, there were activist groups which assailed Starbucks for predatory business practices and a plethora of deleterious effects on the local coffee trade, the environment, and the economic well-being of coffee growers (Thompson and Arsel, 2004). Animal rights activist group ‘Animal Equality’ showed a much strong version of consumer resistance such as a ‘Day without Meat’ event. During the event, demonstrators covered human models with fake blood and plastic sheets in an attempt to raise awareness and move people to stop eating meat (Kaushik, 2013).

**Picture 19 A revolutionary activism of ethical consumption**
Animal rights activists from the group ‘Animal Equality’ shows a much strong version of consumer resistance. By performing this kind of special action, they raise their voices, deliver particular messages and present who they are. This is a very different form of consumer action from what the BORA had conducted.

Often such consumers pursued a form of political consumerism as a means of seeking to transform the capitalist system (e.g. Micheletti et al., 2004; Stolle et al., 2006); for instance, sharing anti-corporate, anti-brand and anti-commercialisation sentiments which fuelled their acts of resistance in relation to the market (e.g. Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Thompson and Arsel, 2004; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Close and Zinkhan, 2009; Sandikci and Ekici, 2009). However, this kind of activism has an assumption that consumers whose identities aren’t typically constructed around mainstream culture necessarily blame and take an opposite action from mainstream consumers (the ‘jeremiad against consumerism’ as coined by Luedicke et al., 2010). They also have their identities forged around their activisms. In other words, discussions of consumer resistance have been limited to collective actions directed at taking an opposite and public position so they relatively ignore other ranges of actions (Penaloza and Price, 1993) such as the mundane and collective practices of the BORA group and members. The BORA is private, discussing the issue of ethical consumption with the BORA members and friends so it is not a huge public declaration.

The BORA members also keenly notice that consumer resistance is limited to revolutionary forms because other groups’ ethical performances are very much inclined to demonstrations or campaigns. As previously discussed, the BORA members believe that the essential aspect of ethical consumption is to practise ethical consumption in a consistent and continual manner. In this sense, they claim that it is important to focus on mundane consumption and small practices in daily lives in relation to ethical consumption. As the activities in daily lives are too natural and ordinary for everyone including the BORA members, they are hardly noticed by others. For instance, subtle behaviour such as the use of re-usable cups may not have been noticed by others in the café, indeed as the interview with So-Yeol Park highlights, few appreciate the significance, or attach special meanings to the subtle behaviour. However, as for the BORA members, understanding the importance of this kind of subtle behaviour is considered to be an essential part of the group ethos that plays a role in making a group distinguished from others.

This raises an issue of social grouping and collective consumption within consumer
culture. More specifically, the notion of group culture which becomes a site of creativity and self-expression for all BORA members plays a significant role in understanding further the social construction of ethical consumption. The BORA members pursue and express the ethical values and ethos via the process of sharing and learning. A more in-depth discussion about the sociality and cultural values in the context of ethical consumption will be made in the following section.

5.4 Sociality

The BORA members focus on the ethical issues in their consumption, displaying and performing their ethical gestures through their consumer life. This is presented in diverse forms from a simple act of circulating information about the ethical practices of companies to a more complex and active form of action such as creating their own ethical consumption activities. These activities are influenced and governed by a particular set of beliefs, opinions and values of the BORA. This is because the unifying consumption patterns are structured based on a unique ethos or a set of common values (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

However, the way of interpreting a set of common ethos or ideology within a group or an organisation should not be ignored. As Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p. 50) argues that, “each subgroup within a subculture is committed to the same set of core values, but each group interprets them in a manner that is contextually consistent with the prevailing life structures (i.e. ages, occupations, family structures) of its members.” Similarly, as each member within a group interprets a set of core values in a different way, the agreed propensity of the group which shows a kind of direction of the group culture seems significant among the group members. This is similar to the ideologies of consumption which are structured by the relationships people have through sharing meanings and mutual support during consumption activities (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Among various factors which constitute the propensity or characteristic of the group, the BORA members focus on the visions and values toward life and society in relation to ethical consumption. The BORA tries to find members who understand, accept and follow the core value or the core motto they pursue which
can produce the authentic ethical consumption practices. As consumers constitute their own categories around ideologies of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), the BORA also categorises itself as an ethically conscious consumer group with an ethos: ethical consumption as an act is not only about practising but also being part of a group in which members put forward their opinions and actively attempt to facilitate change, not least through their personal acts of consumption (Shaw and Riach, 2011). Then ethical consumption includes the notion of sociality which is linked with the group context.

This view towards ethical consumption contrasts with individuals’ decision making of their buying behaviours. It emphasises the pivotal and crucial role of the notion of collective consumption. A collective level of consumption has been relatively ignored in consumer research attending to ethical consumption (see section 2.1) but this thesis claims that it should not be ignored. In the context of ethical consumption, an importance is attached not only to small actions in daily lives which are extensively discussed above, but also to their roles as subtle cues which outsiders of the participant group rarely decipher. These subtle cues bind the BORA members together and reinforce their activities. The BORA’s micro-practices of ethical consumption contain a joint ownership of particular values among the BORA members. Seyfang’s (2007, p. 128) study of sustainable consumption also shows that building a community contains “the sense of communal participation, starting from the feeling that we all know - or potentially know - each other, and continuing on through wider issues, both social and environmental” and at the same time, the members of the community say, “I feel that ‘connectedness’ is important because it’s a cooperative; they are like-minded people.” The commitment of individuals to the shared values constructs a group culture and it settles down as the social world of the BORA which enables the group members to teach and learn the group identity through social interactions. Then the collective consumption constructs and strengthens the relationship among group members. This is in line with understanding consumption as a central space of cultural production (Miller, 2001) in terms of accommodating a critical role of identity construction (Slater and Ritzer, 2001; Trentmann, 2007). Moreover the spread of consumer culture in ethical consumption (Sassatelli, 2007) makes a distinction not only from other non-ethical or
unethical consumers, but also from other ethical consumption-related groups. As previously described, the BORA members conducted their own ethical consumption activities (e.g. the use of re-usable cups or the development of sharing party) which were different from other activities such as demonstrations or campaigns conducted by other similar groups.

The BORA members also recognise the importance of collective consumption, and various activities are conducted at a group level. One of the examples is to conduct the sharing party in order to have an experience of second-hand consumption at a collective level (see details in section 4.4.2). The BORA members understand the sharing party as a form of ethical consumption and at the same time, regard it as a consumer culture which they can share. In *Ethical Consumption: Social Value and Economic Practice*, Isenhour (2012) demonstrates that second-hand consumption is ethical. In the book, there is a young professional couple, working for organisations concerned with sustainability. They extend their concern for sustainability into their personal lives by extremely reducing their environmental impact in daily lives. Using second-hand shops as often as possible is one of them. They believe that their second-hand consumption is more ethical than buying new mass produced goods because these new goods contain the labour issues, and the environmental issues such as wasting significant resources to transport these goods to the stores (Isenhour, 2012). In this vein, they spend a significant amount of time and effort searching second-hand items. However they continue to associate with second-hand shopping because they feel happy and lucky when they find the items they look for. They argue that they sometimes find items which are more expensive and valuable than new items. They are described to be “dumpster divers” who search for something desirable in people’s trash (Isenhour, 2012, p. 171). Like this couple, people who intentionally delve into second-hand stores find and understand the value of second-hand consumption, and they also add particular meanings to used goods. Second-hand items contain unpredictable values because they have complicated backgrounds such as a variety of places they come from, different time periods of production and the number of pre-owners, etc. Some may regard second-hand consumption as a kind of culture, emphasising a particular value and ethos. Kirchenblatt-Gimblett (1998) argues that the proliferation of second-hand markets
shows how disposal and re-use becomes constitutive of cultural boundaries, and how the recoding of some people’s rubbish as valued commodities can constitute what is ‘in’ and cool for others. Dalrymple (2012, p. 2) describes the value of second-hand bookshops as a new work on serendipity and the joys of delving in dusty shelves:

“How many hours, among the happiest of my life, have I spent in the dusty, damp or dismal purlieus of second-hand bookshops, where mummified silverfish, faded pressed flowers and very occasionally love letters are to be found in books long undisturbed on their shelves. With what delight do I find the word ‘scarce’ pencilled in on the flyleaf by the bookseller, though the fact that the book has remained unsold for years, possibly decades, suggests that purchasers are scarcer still.”

The author explains that the aspect of recognising and focusing on the marks in which only second-hand goods can have is the greatest pleasure because it offers serendipity. However Newkey-Burden (2008) argues that some people can’t stand second-hand consumption because it makes them spend a lot of time browsing in second-hand shops. Moreover they hate to see the flaws or scratches made by the previous owners, for instance, used-books have stains, thumbprints, and creases or even ripped pages that degrade the quality of the books. They understand the marks of second-hand books in a completely different way, compared with the serendipity seekers. However, the BORA members have similar thoughts and views toward second-hand consumption with the serendipity seekers or dumpster divers, understanding the value of second-hand consumption. They recognise and admire a second-hand ethos which not only includes ethical values in terms of reducing waste and wasting extra resources, but also the taste of ‘retro’, ‘vintage’, ‘classic’, or ‘memory’ of the objects. When the BORA members conducted the sharing party, one part of the activity was to talk about and share the background stories of the objects that accommodate the retro feeling. In this way, as for the BORA members, the sharing party becomes a group culture which makes an opportunity to share, learn and co-create particular values of second-hand consumption.

To summarise, the social tie made by participating in voluntary associations is a
potential source of motivation to take action (Barnett et al., 2005a; Neilson and Paxton, 2010). Members learn and teach each other about a particular value or ethos, and this process produces inconspicuous webs of meanings and connections between people (Berger and Ward, 2010), thereby bringing a sense of community and identity which in turn paves the way for individual and collective action embedded in a group context. The BORA members also learn and teach each other about ethical consumption by experiencing various ethical consumption activities at a collective level. Like the phenomenon that dumpster divers spontaneously gather in a vintage fair and share the value of second-hand consumption, the BORA members gather and commonly share the ethos of ethical consumption, creating a network that connects the group members. They understand and learn ethical consumption, co-creating the ethical ethos and beliefs which ultimately create the identities and the culture of the BORA. This raises an idea that ethical consumption is embedded in a group context. This view criticises the traditional view of consumption which is understood to be a personal activity because the purchasing and possessing behaviours are predominantly considered, and other aspects of consumption have been ignored (Connolly and Prothero, 2003). By the same token, it challenges the view that ethical consumption is an individual ethical buying behaviour, and it claims the group level of understandings of ethical consumption.

Then, it is necessary to explore the elements to make social groups and their group cultures. These are explained through the notion of cultural capital or cultural knowledge which requires the necessary connoisseurship to decode the meanings (Berger and Ward, 2010). For instance, Featherstone (2007) argues that consumer culture contains knowledge but it is not just about cost-efficient goods and bargains, or that of the connoisseur or taste-marker who knows their wine, décor, restaurants, and travel destinations, but also knowledge of the ethical background of goods. This study discusses the knowledge of consumer culture by focusing not only on the general features of the goods (and services), but also on the production processes of them. As for Featherstone, understanding consumer culture can be done through understanding both the goods and how they are produced. This raises an issue of particular cues or signs existing in each consumer culture. It is well worth investigating these indications
because they play a role of defining the group membership and at the same time, making a distinction from others by signifying a particular group culture. This will be further discussed in the following section.

5.5 Subtle signals

The BORA members conduct their own particular consumption practices, possessing and sharing particular values that construct their own culture and the group membership. Then, consumption becomes both a fence or bridge (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996) which constructs symbolic borders between groups (Weber, 1904/2001; Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont, 1992) and at the same time, provides access to social networks and organisations (Kanter, 1977). The example of the BORA's choice of place supports this argument. Interestingly, the BORA members choose particular types of coffee shops whenever they have the group meetings, and this plays a role of constructing their own social boundary. Before investigating the types of coffee shops the BORA chooses, it is well worth discussing the social role of coffee shops first.

Waxman’s (2006) study about place attachment shows that patrons are attached to their particular coffee shops for a variety of reasons, with each being unique to each person and reflecting his or her lived experiences, current life situation, and motivation for visiting the place. The BORA also puts emphasis on coffee shops among various places because they have become the places where people can gather, speak freely, and mingle with others from their communities (Oldenburg, 1999). Historically, the role of coffee shops was to go beyond serving beverages. According to Milgram (1967), coffee shops as geographical hubs of social interaction provide the opportunities to recognise the small world nature of society. A ‘small world’ is one in which any pair of individuals can be connected via a surprisingly small degree of separation (Watts and Strogatz, 1998). According to Habermas (1989), the role of 17th century coffee shops in creating a civic space and a commensurate sense of ‘public opinion’, and the importance of that for the growth of democracy, has been discussed by historians. In a more recent view, coffee houses have provided places for social intercourse and conversation as well as political debate (Pendergrast, 1999). As people meet, in pairs or groups, the collective
experience of the community is retrieved and exchanged so the network of individuals influence and are influenced (Stafford, 2003).

The BORA members also recognise and understand that the social value is embedded in the space of the coffee shop. However, they do not consider all coffee shops the same. More specifically, as for the BORA members, there are differences among the ethical coffee shops. They make a distinction between a branded and a non-branded ethical store. For instance, they consider Starbucks’ Fair Trade coffees and Fair Trade coffees in local cafés differently. The BORA members are in doubt about branded stores or franchises even though they offer ethically produced goods. They argue that Starbucks sell Fair Trade coffees only with the packaged bean-types so customers cannot have the actual Fair Trade coffee drinks at stores. The BORA members believe that Starbucks should sell Fair Trade coffees at stores if Starbucks really cared about ethical issues. As previously discussed in section 4.3, this is because selling coffee beans accounts for a relatively small portion of Starbucks’ entire sales but Starbucks promotes itself as an ethical brand. This is more about a marketing tool which helps Starbucks have a positive and moral brand image. This can be supported by Dobscha and Ozanne’s (2001) study which shows the cynicism of ethical marketing: one participant, Laura argues that I am bothered by the improper use of the ‘green’ product symbol. Chatzidakis et al.’s (2012, p. 505) study also problematises the global nature of the Fair Trade movement, seeing this as having sold out to the marketing system: a female participant who is a member of Exarcheia-based collective says, “… the problem is the way that Fair Trade has been developed in Europe and now you can find Fair Trade products in supermarkets and even in Starbucks. So we don’t agree with that…”

Apart from this controversial issue of understanding a particular place, understanding how the role of places makes an influence on the BORA members and their activities is significant. Here, the term ‘place’ means particular geographical or physical settings the BORA chooses (for instance CHD) but the place is understood and used as ‘space’ which is filled with particular meanings (see more details in section 2.5.4). This is in line with Chatzidakis et al.’s (2012, p. 502) description about heterotopian space, saying,

235
“The profile of Exarcheia’s commercial zone and its consumptionscapes (Ger and Belk, 1996) reflect its heterotopian character. (...) Equally disproportionate is the amount of record shops, alternative small businesses, and various organic and local food stores. For some of the more traditionally left-wing residents, these signify a ‘happier’ generation of outlets, starting in the early 2000s, to cater for newer forms of lifestyle-based activism. There is a particular aesthetic to many Exarcheian bars, cafes, and restaurants, and this is often further expressed in names such as Decadence, Molotof, Kalashnikov Garden, and Necropolis. As one of our informants said, Exarcheia residents wouldn’t like their bars and restaurants to look like the ones in neighbouring areas ‘...which are very fancy and without a character. In this area you will find taverns or bars that have a strong sense of character...’” (Female, Exarcheia resident)

As the Exarcheia’s place shows a particular character, people construct and show their identities through the context of space (Harvey, 1989; Gieryn, 2000). Space is theorised as a social construction created and manipulated by people (Tuan, 1977; Harvey, 1989; Gieryn, 2000). Researchers intertwine the study of youth culture with the study of space (Hetherington, 1998; Massey, 1998; Bernett, 2000/2004). For example, Glass (2012, p. 706) argues that, “the combination of decorations on the house, styles on punk bodies, and punk events transformed the space into a scene place, filling it with rich meanings and feelings of connection for those within the punk community.” This is similar to a rainbow flag or a ‘safe place’ sticker on some shops’ glass doors which indicates gay or gay friendly space. Within the boundary of these gay friendly shops, the gay subculture can actively be encouraged so an open conversation about condemning others’ race, gender, politics or diverse expressions of sexuality can be discouraged (Kates, 2002). Hetherington (1998) argues that pubs and clubs are ‘sites of social centrality’ where culturally specific behaviours and actions are conducted. This implies that the people and place interact together to form the experience (Waxman, 2006). Likewise, the BORA members choose a particular type of coffee shop which pursues and delivers the ethical values that are considered to be authentic by the BORA members (see details in section 4.5.4). They find that the choice of this particular place enables them to conduct ethical consumption and at the same time, they transform the place into an ethical space,
filling it with the culture of the BORA. The social world of the BORA may not be explicitly noticed by others but within the space, the BORA members actively interact and communicate with each other by conducting their own consumption practices and sharing their ethical beliefs and ethos.

Then, consumption becomes a communication tool by which people can communicate identity either in publicly visible domains (Belk, 1988; Berger and Heath, 2007) or in a subtle and inconspicuous manner (Berger and Ward, 2010). For instance, wealthier households spend a larger share of their income on visible goods such as cars and clothes (Heffetz, 2007). Moreover the aspect of purchasing and possessing products with visible markers such as explicit logos and brand names plays a role of an explicit signal to show identity because it is easily observed by the public. Even though explicit or conspicuous signals are an effective tool to show one’s identity and impress others (Fisman, 2008), they have downsides such as imitation and the damage of the authenticity. People tend to adopt the preferences and tastes of aspiration groups to construct a desired social identity or to be treated like a member of that group (Simmel, 1904/1957). Then, more recognisable symbols can easily be identified and adopted by others, for instance, “if the jocks wear Abercrombie and less popular students (e.g. the ‘geeks’) want to be treated like jocks, then the geeks may start buying Abercrombie shirts hoping that others will start treating them like jocks” (Berger and Ward, 2010, p. 558). However the jocks may not only focus on purchasing clothes from Abercrombie, but they also put emphasis on the way of wearing them. They may not wear anything inside the Abercrombie shirts or they may not fasten all buttons up to the neck because they know that this is the style of Abercrombie. On the other hand, the geeks, namely the pretenders may wear a white T-shirt inside the Abercrombie shirts or fasten all buttons. This ruins the fit for the wearer which is the most important part of making Abercrombie stylish. In this way, wearing Abercrombie shirts plays a role of an explicit marker, and a certain way of wearing the Abercrombie shirts is a kind of hidden marker - inconspicuousness. Both an explicit marker and an inconspicuous value represents that the wearer knows Abercrombie and has an interest in fashion in some ways. The geeks can make an attempt to imitate the jocks by wearing the same Abercrombie shirts, but they hardly become the authentic jocks unless they recognise and follow the hidden
value.

In this way, the hidden value which is considered to be a subtle signal is likely missed because it flies beneath the radar and fails to be decoded by most observers. As subtle cues require the necessary connoisseurship to recognise the existence of them and to decode their meaning, only few such as the insiders can have and use them (Berger and Ward, 2010). The aspect of recognising and understanding subtle cues builds the authenticity within the group (Elliott and Davies, 2006). In this vein, any BORA member who ignores or fails to understand and conduct a particular practice can be considered as an inauthentic group member because authentic ethical consumption activities can never be achieved for those who don’t entirely catch how the BORA members understand the notion of ethical consumption. Goffman (1969) uses the term ‘authentic performance’ in his study of the performance of identity, arguing that it is both transmission and reception of culturally appropriate actions among the group members. Elliott and Davies (2006, p. 156) also argue that one mistake in any aspect blows the authentic performance, and inauthentic performances which are defined as “failing to truly appreciate the culture, history, rituals and traditions of the community” are easily noticed rather than unnoticed.

The BORA members develop and conduct their own particular consumption practices based on their own systems of knowledge and cultural codes regarding ethical consumption. Then, these particular consumption practices are shared among the group members and settled down as an authentic form of ethical consumption. As the example of conducting the Balwoo Gongyang activity or the sharing party, and using re-usable cups shows, considering the micro-practices of daily lives is one of the essential factors for constructing the authentic membership of the BORA. It plays a role of signalling to others and reading the signals from other group members. These transmission and reception processes imply the possession of cultural resources or cultural capital (Adkins and Lury, 1999) which prescribes the authenticity of the group. The cultural resources or cultural capital are described as the non-financial social assets such as cultural knowledge (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973; Thornton, 1996; Adkins and Lury, 1999) (see details in section 2.3.3.3). As the example above shows, subtle cues do not
necessarily mean the choice of particular objects but they also include non-objective forms: the jocks are articulated not just by the display of Abercrombie shirts, but by a certain way of wearing them. In this case, subtle signals are considered to be how the selected objects are used, namely, the performances of the users. This is in line with the sociological meaning of style which is comprised of the symbolic materials (which are about ‘display’) and the ways in which they are used (which is about ‘performances’ of the users) (Brake, 1985) (see details in section 2.4.6). Style is a symbolic tool to present who I am, and at the same time, make a distinction from others (Kjeldgaard, 2009). The performance aspect of style plays a role of subtle cues which are hardly noticeable unless a certain level of tastes and knowledge to understand them are acquired. As for the BORA members, the choice of a particular coffee shop (e.g. the choice of CHD) is not the only significant sign to present who they are, but how and what they act and conduct in the selected place (e.g. the use of re-usable cups) also forms their identities.

Compared with explicit signals which can easily be imitated by others, subtle cues namely inconspicuous markers, provide a much clear distinction because only people who have acquired certain abilities, namely cultural capital can actually consume (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998). And they also play a significant role in discussing the authenticity of membership (Thornton, 1996) because selecting subtle signals is a deliberate strategy which makes outsiders hard to copy in-group tastes (Hebdige, 1979). This is in line with the notion of inconspicuous consumption in which Berger and Ward (2010) defines that consumers subtly make a distinction from others by having their own subtle values which are hard to copy. The notion of inconspicuous consumption has been employed in the limited context such as the luxury, household brand or leisure industry (Sullivan and Gershuny, 2004; Coupland, 2005; Berger and Ward, 2010) (see details in section 2.2.5). However, this thesis shows that it can be well employed in the context of ethical consumption in relation to the BORA members’ authentic performance, identity and group membership (Hebdige, 1979; Kidder, 2005). It demonstrates that ethical consumption works ‘quietly’ as a subtle and inconspicuous kind of activism embedded in a group context. Then, ethical consumption can be considered to be part of consumer culture in a group, and this demonstrates the importance of socio-cultural understanding of ethical consumption.
Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Concluding remarks

This thesis has sought to explore the concept of ethical consumption from the socio-cultural perspective that is about how consumers define, mould and create themselves by interacting with the material world around them through consumption practices. As stressed throughout the thesis the realm of ethical consumption is still elusive and has room to further develop despite the existence of a myriad of ethical consumption studies in various disciplines. In particular previous ethical consumption studies in the field of management are relatively inclined to investigate purchasing behaviours of ethical products in the marketplace in terms of the individual’s decision-making processes, motivations, and attitude-behaviour gap, etc.

This thesis has argued that ethical consumption is much more complex than buying ethical products. Ethical consumption is not a concept which has definitive answers or solutions for particular issues. This thesis has explored what aspect of reality the term ‘ethical consumption’ opens up for us or what aspect of reality it refers to.

The aim of this thesis was to ‘explore’ and ‘identify’ how the participants understand and interpret the concept of ethical consumption by looking at the activities and practices they are involved in. In other words, an emphasis is put on understanding the meanings and values of the participants’ ethical consumption practices because those practices show who they are and what they believe, building their own socio-cultural world. From this, this thesis aims to make a contribution to the understanding of the socio-cultural context of ethical consumption.

The current chapter offers an overall conclusion to the thesis by summarising the key findings of the research and explicating their implications. This chapter starts with revisiting the research questions and explaining the underlying rationale for them. This section elucidates the meaning and purpose of each question. Then the key findings are theoretically explained, with a review of the theories employed and the findings
explaining the theoretical insights and contributions of this thesis. The findings are also linked with the managerial and practical perspectives, suggesting any managerial implications. A discussion of methodological implications is also significant. In particular, as this thesis employs a multifaceted qualitative methods approach which includes participant observation and semi-structured interviews, some of the characteristics of the South Korean context such as the linguistic and cultural features are extensively discussed. Finally, reflections and directions of the future research are suggested.

6.2 Research questions

The research questions are threefold as follows:

1) How is ethical consumption displayed and performed?

2) How is the meaning of ethical consumption activities created and perceived by an ethically conscious consumer group in South Korea?

3) Why do participants create and perform various types of ethical consumption activities?

The underlying rationale for these research questions is to see how the participants of this thesis understand and interpret the realm of ethical consumption by looking at their activities and their interaction in the BORA group. The fundamental philosophical assumption of the research questions is that the nature of the world is subjective and socially constructed so people interpret and construct meanings in different ways even about the same phenomenon (Wellington et al., 2005). Therefore this thesis is not about investigating a definite or an objective answer to the research questions but is about exploring and describing the subject matter by observing the participants and their social world, and offering my own reflection of them. This also demonstrates the reason why the term ‘how’ and ‘why’ is used in the research questions rather than using ‘what’ type of questions.
Research question 1 attempts to explore various types of ethical consumption activities and the processes of how the participants create and perform the activities. Basically the conducted activities are influenced by how the participants understand and interpret the notion of ethical consumption. In other words, various types of ethical consumption activities are the actual presentation of the participants’ reflection and thought of ethical consumption. Therefore answering question 1 demonstrates what they do in order to conduct ethical consumption and how they understand the meaning of ethical consumption.

However the conducted activities can be understood and interpreted in various ways as people see the same phenomenon in different ways (Wellington et al., 2005). Understanding the social world depends on one’s mind (Crotty, 1998). In this vein, question 2 seeks the meanings and values of what the participants create and perform. This includes what aspects of ethical consumption are considered significant for the participants.

Question 3 explores the rationale of why various types of ethical consumption activities are created and performed by the participants. This also includes the motivations of how the participants develop and conduct particular types of activities. As the discussion of questions 1 and 2 show, the conducted activities are influenced and motivated by the participants’ ethos and beliefs of ethical consumption. At the same time, the activities are extensively influenced by the performers, namely the participant group identities. Therefore, answering question 3 not only shows what the participants focus mainly on in relation to the field of ethical consumption but also identifies the characteristics of the participant group.

6.3 Theoretical insights

The findings of this thesis have demonstrated the complex nature of ethical consumption, revealing how widely ethical consumption can be presented and understood. The findings also indicate that ethical consumption is not just limited to the field of purchase but that it is also interconnected or intertwined with other areas such
as social, cultural or even political realms. This ambiguous nature of ethical consumption could particularly be observed from the participants’ ethical consumption practices which were part of their daily lives. However seen from the perspective of non-ethical consumers like me, their practices were considered unique and noticeable. In other words ethical consumption was seen as inconspicuous as well as conspicuous. As is often the case, people sometimes want to be ethical but they ignore ethics at other times. Ironically this ambiguity makes my thesis distinct from previous ethical consumption studies which tend to fall into a single category of ethical buying behaviour. In other words the field of ethical consumption can be dealt with in a multitude of disciplines. In particular this thesis has adopted literatures which are linked with the field of sociology such as Veblen’s conspicuous consumption, Bourdieu’s taste, Brake’s sociological understanding of style and subculture studies in order to understand the socio-cultural aspects of ethical consumption in greater depth (see details in Chapter 2).

All these theories are considered to be belonging to a family-theory because they commonly deal with the social role of consumption within the consumer society and culture. However each theory has its own distinctiveness and its own role in this thesis.

Veblen’s conspicuous consumption theory was acclaimed because it covered the social role of consumer behaviour which goes beyond the individual context. Veblen’s theory seems incompatible with ethical consumption because it is closely linked to status consumption focusing on waste and excess. However the context of inconspicuous consumption which is rooted in Veblen’s conspicuous consumption plays a core role in understanding how ethically conscious consumers subtly make a distinction from others by developing and conducting their own ways of ethical consumption practices.

This includes the performative aspect of consumption which Brake’s (1985) three components of style: demeanour, image and language focus particularly on. The concept of style is most often employed in the field of fashion but my thesis demonstrates its usefulness in understanding how ethically conscious consumers display and perform their ethical identity which ultimately constructs a distinctive
social world. It shows how they position themselves as ethically conscious consumers through the negotiating and compromising processes with their ambiguous and imperfect ethical ethos.

Bourdieu’s taste theory also discusses the role of making a distinction by having particular tastes and cultural capitals. However Bourdieu’s theory was particularly useful in dealing with making a distinction within the everyday practices and lifestyle (the whole way of living) so it is not limited to the aspect of buying products. Bourdieu focused on all the choices people make in daily lives - from the choices of particular goods to the individuals’ certain social behaviours (Goldthorpe, 2007).

The context of subculture also demonstrates the nature of making a distinction ‘within’ and ‘outside’ the ethically conscious consumer group. In particular each BORA member experienced the negotiating and challenging processes within and outside the group holding both values; diversity and unity. The BORA members understood and shared the core ethical values, practices and behaviours but at the same time they were not necessarily common to all individuals involved (Bellou, 2008). Some of the BORA members didn’t conduct the ‘Balwoo Gongyang’ activity even though they understood and accepted the ethical values and meanings of the activity (see section 4.3.2). By holding a system of “shared values and beliefs that produces norms of behaviour and establish an organizational way of life” (Koberg and Chusmir, 1987, p. 397), an individual became a member of the BORA but like a subcultural group, each member also had distinctive characteristics reflecting the particular values of sub-unit (Bellou, 2008). In this vein the subcultural context is useful in understanding the existence of multiple small cultures within the organisation (Hatch, 1997).

However the subcultural context which includes the resistant and opposite characteristics of the dominant culture is incompatible with another important aspect of this thesis: ordinary consumers’ everyday consumption practices. My thesis claims that ethical consumption is linked to the everyday language so it is the daily experiences and practices of ‘ordinary consumers’.
This thesis reviewed and revisited the existing theories used in a multitude of disciplines, and adopted the useful aspects of the theories into the context of ethical consumption. A lot of theories discussed in this thesis are rarely applied to the field of ethical consumption. This is similar to Chatzidakis et al.’s (2007) study; the neutralization theory which is mainly used in extreme violence cases is applied to the context of ethical consumption. It is attempted that previous or existing theories are seen from a different perspective, and accordingly ethical consumption is interpreted from a different perspective as well.

My thesis plays with ambiguities in context and theory so it attempts to challenge and demonstrate that ethical consumption covers various themes (categories/disciplines) encompassing a wide range of practices, political stances, and consumer culture. From this, it ultimately reveals that the realm of ethical consumption can be better understood by adopting a socio-cultural perspective.

6.4 Managerial implications

This thesis delivers not only theoretical insights to academics in various disciplines, e.g. marketing, management, and sociology but also offers some managerial implications to practitioners such as business managers and business consultants. In particular the findings of this thesis can be understood in relation to the business circumstances in the field of ethical production and consumption. From this, practitioners can find various ways to approach the realm of ethical consumption. A number of managerial implications are summarised as follows:

First of all, companies focus too much on offering ‘ethical products’ to ‘ethical consumers’ with a belief that it is the only way to conduct ethical production in their businesses. Companies tend to make ethical purchasers differentiate from the mainstream and categorise them as a kind of ‘special’ group of people. For instance, the majority of supermarkets construct an organic section which is filled with organic products only. They are relatively expensive because they have the added values which are symbolised by the organic trademark. Johnston et al. (2011, p. 293) claim that,
“while a hopeful trend, it raises the question of whether ethical consumption is primarily an elite social practice, especially since niche markets for ethical food products (for example, organics or Fair Trade) are thought to attract wealthy, educated consumers.” In this way, ethical purchasers are limited to or categorised to be a ‘certain’ group of people. It also suggests that an ethical impact can be achieved and that a form of complete or perfect ethical consumption is available.

However, making a separate section only for ethical products builds a boundary which divides the marketplace into different categories. As one of the key findings of this thesis claims that ethical consumption can be done by everyone in their daily lives (see details in section 4.2), companies should proliferate the value of ethical consumption to the ordinary consumers and everyday small acts that make a difference. By the same token, ethical products should be dealt with as ordinary goods so they can be exposed to everyone and can be embedded in our daily lives.

This should not be limited to ethical products but there are various ways to make the ethical ethos permeated in everyone’s daily lives. The case of Germany’s first waste-free supermarket is one of the manifest examples. Higher Perspective (2014) explains the concept of the store, saying, “to eliminate food-packaging waste before it even gets into the shopping cart is the idea behind Original Unverpackt, a new concept supermarket in Germany that takes things into zero-waste territory by encouraging consumers to bring re-usable containers to the store.” The store removes disposable boxes, bags, jars or other containers, and offers bulk bins and refillable water bottles for beverage stations. Therefore customers have to take part in ethical consumption because they have to bring their own recyclable bags to the store. The store does not necessarily provide ethically produced goods such as Fair Trade or organic items but it develops its own eco-friendly way to sell food and shows how everyone can contribute to making their carbon footprint smaller. The zero-waste grocery store’s approach is not completely novel because some of the farmers’ markets or local grocery stores already practised removing packages and/or never using packaging a long time ago. However, what is novel is that the grocery conglomerates which produce a huge amount of waste material can practically participate in ethical production and ethical consumption.
Considering the fact that 80% of goods sold in supermarkets is wrapped in toxic packaging (Higher Perspective, 2014), this approach seems to prove a manifest result in reducing unnecessary trash every day.

Second, companies put too much emphasis on the ethical trademarks or symbols as a means to promote ethical products. In particular, the Fair Trade mark has become a common sight on our supermarket shelves (The Guardian, 2014). The Fair Trade mark is an independent consumer label awarded in the UK by the Fair Trade Foundation so it guarantees that the product fulfils Fair Trade criteria (Traidcraft, 2014). However, as previously discussed, the ethical trademark itself is not always positive because there are some issues hidden in the use or adoption of the mark such as the power relations among various parties (see details in section 4.2.2.2). Moreover there are some products claiming to be fair trade but not carrying the mark because the mark is only available to those products which meet the internationally-agreed Fair Trade criteria (Traidcraft, 2014). The use of the ethical certification mark also entails a huge amount of budget because developing ethical criteria takes time and money (Traidcraft, 2014). This process ultimately makes the price of ethical products high.

The discussion in section 4.2.2.2 shows that consumers including the participants of this thesis doubt about the role of ethical marks because they do not actually know how these marks are applied to certain products and how they guarantee the products to be ethical. Therefore this thesis claims that companies should not just focus on promoting ethical marks but other values of ethical production and consumption should actively be found and added. As one of the findings of this thesis puts emphasis on the after-use values in relation to the receptacle for the coffee (see details in section 4.3.3), business managers can re-think the after-use values of their products. For instance, well-known coffee brand Lavazza attempts to create a coffee cup that produces little to zero waste by focusing on the after-use values. Lavazza creates an edible coffee cup which is made of a pastry (that can be best described as a cross between an ice cream cone and a biscotti) filled with a special patented icing sugar which works as an insulator making the cup waterproof (The Culture-ist, 2012).
**Picture 20 Lavazza’s edible cookie cup**

The brilliant idea was dreamed up by Venezuelan designer Enrique Luis Sardi who wanted to create a coffee cup that produced little to zero waste and had all the frills and more of a perfect coffee cup (The Culture-ist, 2012).

The edible cup can act as a sweetener for the espresso and a cookie which is served with coffee. Even if consumers throw the cup away, it can be melted down so the amount of waste can be reduced.

*Lavazza* has not yet announced when the edible coffee cup will be available to consumers (The Culture-ist, 2012). Even though it still remains a conceptual framework, it seems novel and innovative as lots of coffee brands have focused extensively on offering Fair Trade coffee or organic coffee. Thus other approaches to conduct ethical production and consumption have been ignored so far. It implies that companies should get out of the box when understanding ethical consumption. Companies can focus not only on the products and materials used but also on the aspect of product-in-use and after-use benefits.

Third it is important to focus on the relationship between voluntary groups (e.g. the BORA) and other stakeholders whose primary objectives are other than the traditional ones of profit, market share, and return on investment such as social corporations and social entrepreneurs. Social corporations like the SEEDS can work with the BORA-type of group as a bridge which can link among the public and social firms. For example the BORA built a partnership with the social firm, *the Big Issue* and

---

participated in the *Big Issue* street campaigns called ‘Big Dom’ in South Korea. By and large, social corporations are relatively submissive in terms of dealing with the realm of marketing such as conducting market research, organising advertising campaigns, managing public relations and promoting the enterprise to a wider public because they primarily use marketing not for profit but for contributions (Doyle, 2011). As voluntary groups find opportunities to do volunteer works, it is expected to have a synergy effect by building a partnership between a social corporation and a voluntary group like the BORA.

Marketers have jumped on the ethical bandwagon, conducting their business seemingly in an ethical and a socially responsible way. This is linked to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) which is generally understood as “the obligation of the firm to use its resources in ways to benefit society, through committed participation as a member of society, taking into account the society at large and improving welfare of society at large independent of direct gains of the company” (Kok *et al.*, 2001, p. 288). CSR is one of the most significant corporate trends of the last decade (Barnea and Rubin, 2010) and nowadays it is not very difficult to see CSR practices in most industries. However one of the major criticisms of CSR practices is for companies to focus too much on the strategic/instrumental use of CSR which can improve the competitiveness of firms (see Porter and Van der Linde, 1995; McWilliams *et al.*, 2006; Beurden and Gossling, 2008). In other words CSR is by and large engaged in increasing financial and social performance (Waddock and Graves, 1997; Husted and de Jesus Salazar, 2006) which could be found mostly by the company’s self-presentation of CSR practices (Snider *et al.*, 2003).

Selling ethically produced goods such as Fair Trade chocolates or organic cotton clothes is one of the most common and prominent examples of CSR practices. Companies consider that their role ends with offering ethically produced goods and position consumer choice as a site of responsibility (Lewis and Potter, 2011) so the consumer has to become a responsible actor who makes a decision to purchase (or not) ethically produced goods. Companies tend to assume or consider consumers as active agents who are privatised, informed citizens able to ‘make a difference’ in their life.
through conscious, considered acts of responsible consumption (Barnett *et al.*, 2005a, 2005b; Lewis and Potter, 2011).

This approach has a limitation in that companies are often criticised to be a mere creator of a new niche market because they still encourage people to continue consuming while simply replacing less ‘caring’ products with others (Monbiot, 2007). As this thesis argues, ethical consumption is not just associated with materialism, excess and selfish individualism but it is also connected to a wider set of social relations and collective concerns.

Therefore marketers should acknowledge that the value of ethics is not just an issue of the individual stakeholder’s morality and responsibility but it is linked to broader questions of impact and care within the consumer society. As the value of ethical consumption is increasingly entering into so called ‘ordinary consumers’ (Lewis and Potter, 2011), today’s ethical consumerism is integrated into lifestyle culture which explains the rise of ‘lifestyle politics’ (ibid, 2011). Then it is crucial that both marketers and consumers can engage with various modes of ‘lifestyle activism’ rather than a mode of selling or buying ethically produced goods.

### 6.5 Methodological implications

This thesis employs an ethnographic approach which requires an overall understanding of the practices, situations and literal aspects in daily lives. As the empirical study was conducted in South Korea, the socio-cultural understandings of the South Korean context should be importantly considered. In particular there are some essential features which should be considered significant when conducting qualitative research in South Korea.

First of all, the choice of place for interviews is a noticeable issue. As discussed in section 3.9, all the participants prefer to have interviews in public places rather than at home or in closed places. This is associated with how South Korean interviewees perceive their houses. Some of the South Koreans consider their houses as a very
private place which can be shared exclusively by their family members, near relatives or close friends. They usually invite people to their houses only when they have special occasions such as housewarming parties. Without such special purposes, they normally go to cafes or pubs to meet people. In South Korea, most public places such as cafes or pubs open until dawn so it is easy to find the meeting places any time. In this vein, an interviewer or a researcher needs to think about the choice of place when conducting interviews in South Korea.

Second, the linguistic features of the Korean language play an important role. South Koreans tend to use circumlocution, or euphemistic expressions because they believe that direct or straightforward expressions can be considered too strong or impolite in some ways (see details in section 3.9). Thus interviewers should be familiar with such Korean way of speaking otherwise they may not be able to catch the points or nuances what the interviewees try to deliver. Moreover South Koreans are supposed to use honorific languages when they talk to older or unfamiliar people. This is not just about using different types of languages to the other person but also about considering the existence of hierarchy. In other words there are power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee or among the participants of focus groups which are particularly challenging given the theoretical and practical basis of these approaches. For instance, if there are focus group interviewees who are different in their ages or social positions (e.g. professors and students are gathered together), it is possible to notice that some of them may be active or honest in presenting their opinions but some may not. In this vein, understanding the characteristics of language, culture and human relationships of South Korea is a requisite for researchers.

6.6 Limitations

This thesis also includes some limitations. First of all, this thesis deals with the data collected in South Korea but the employed theories were developed in the Western context. It could be questioned whether Western consumer theories are applicable to the Asian context without causing any theoretical gaps. Even though Western theories have a long history of studying consumption, it is still controversial to adopt them in the
Asian context. For instance the Asia Academy of Management Conference in December 2010 focused particularly on the topic of applicability and limits of Western leadership theories in the Asian context (see Asia Pacific Journal of Management in 2011). As society inevitably changes, the theories, or the interpretations of the theories, are also bound to change accordingly. In this vein, this thesis admittedly contains limitations.

Second the field work was conducted only in Seoul, South Korea so it is hard to say that it represents and generalises the whole South Korean context (see also in section 3.10). In other words the socio-geographical characteristics of Seoul may imply some potential constraints in understanding ethical consumption practices in other areas in South Korea.

6.7 Reflections and directions of future research

Even though this thesis may make a contribution to understanding ethical consumption practice within the South Korean context, the following discussion is well worth revisiting; first of all it seemed valuable to meet and talk with the SEEDS. I participated in the meetings of the SEEDS in order to listen to their thoughts or plans about the BORA. However in a practical and ethical sense, I felt it hard to continue joining the meeting because they looked understandably uncomfortable to share their internal information with an outsider. I should have attempted to talk in a more casual and comfortable way about the BORA with the SEEDS. This is because I identified myself as an unethical or a non-ethical consumer which took a completely opposite position to the BORA, and I sometimes felt that the BORA members’ thoughts and beliefs about ethical consumption were quite illogical and not understandable. For instance they emphasised that they quietly and subtly presented ethical values in daily lives so they were different from revolutionary activists or political demonstrators. Some participants chose to use social firms in order to avoid using unethical conglomerates but they considered themselves different from boycott activists. However in my view, this kind of ethical behaviour seemed similar to other activists’. I wanted to reveal my thoughts and views toward the BORA’s behaviours and practices but I tried to be very careful not
to make any conflicts during my field work. Therefore conversations with the SEEDS might help understand the BORA because the SEEDS have the third-person view which is in between the internal and external position of the BORA.

In this way, during the field work, I as a researcher and at the same time as an insider of the BORA experienced and learnt the negotiating processes. The BORA members might have the same experiences as mine in order to obtain the group membership.

Second in terms of understanding and clarifying the learning processes of the new BORA members (e.g. how an individual becomes a member of the BORA by learning and sharing the value of ethical consumption within the group), I should have participated in all activities of both Group 3 and Group 4. I only joined some parts of each group’s activities because of practical constraints. However it turned out useful to have joined all the activities of both groups so that I could observe how each member gets into a group and becomes a member of the group.

This thesis also offers some possible directions for the future research. First, there is a strong relationship between ethical consumption and political preferences. Seyfang’s (2007) study of sustainable consumption communities finds that 60 per cent of respondents identified ‘the Greens’ as a political party in that the way of advertising their activities is quite embedded in politics as is shown in such activities as anti-GM meeting, Green Party posters, alternative healthcare practices, wildlife conservation campaigns, etc. By the same token, most of the BORA members supported the left-wing in South Korea (see details in section 4.1.4). Some members manifestly presented their political support for the left-wing by reading the left-wing oriented newspapers or uploading their opinions onto their social media website. Some members rather chose to subtly present their political views, for instance, some avoid buying goods produced from conglomerates which are closely connected with the right-wing. They also had negative views toward the big labelled ethically produced goods. As the political preferences make a direct and indirect influence on the BORA members’ ethical consumption practices, this should be further investigated.
In relation to the views toward conglomerates, second, an investigation of the relationship between ethically conscious consumers and their choices of employment seems to be interesting. Some of the BORA members intentionally choose to intern at or work in social firms rather than working in large corporations. This is accepted as rather a peculiar phenomenon in South Korea because a majority of job seekers are eager to enter famous conglomerates such as Samsung, Hyundai and CJ because of an attractive level of annual salaries, well-established welfare systems and a good level of working environments (Kookje Newspaper, 2014). I can assume that the BORA members intentionally avoid applying for large corporations because of the personal reasons such as unbearable anxiety from fierce competition. At the same time, it is assumed that their choices of employment may reflect their negative thoughts of large corporations. In other words, some part of their ethical ethos may make an influence on the choices of employment. Thus the relationship between ethical perspectives and employment seems to be a potential area to be researched into.

Third, family and inter-generational aspects of ethical consumption are well worth investigating. There is evidence that the BORA members are influenced by and make an influence on their family members regarding the way of approaching to ethical consumption (see section 4.1.5). It is suggested to further explore how the current study insights can link together a close study of family dynamics.

Finally, the aspect of purchasing ethically produced goods can be further developed in relation to the notion of quiet/subtle resistance and consumer creativity. As indicated in section 4.5.3, the BORA members had their own ways of choosing ethically produced goods when they had a chance to purchase them. In other words, the BORA members did not perceive that all ethically produced goods were the same. The context of purchase which is often considered to be an individual activity can also be understood at a collective level, and this brings an idea of subtle resistance and consumer creativity. Therefore there is room to investigate how they draw a line between ethically produced goods.
## Appendices

### 1 Email discussion with the gatekeeper before the field-work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14th June 2011</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>The initial contact to the BORA group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th June 2011</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Showed positive response with some information about other ethical consumption-related groups, requested the research proposal in Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th June 2011</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Re:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th June 2011</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Re:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st August 2011</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Explained a more detailed fieldwork plan, research methods, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st August 2011</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Replied the email carbon copied to three other BORA members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th August 2011</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Re:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th August 2011</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Re:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th September 2011</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Discussed the visiting period and requested the overall schedule of the BORA group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th September 2011</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Offered a PPT file which was used during the orientation programme for the new members, offered the address of the BORA blog, website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th September 2011</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Re:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th September 2011</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Requested the research proposal again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th October 2011</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Discussed the first meeting date, time and place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd November 2011</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Offered the possible date, time and the BORA office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2  The scheme and the aim of each stage in the BORA activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td>Opening the issue of ethical consumption to the society</td>
<td>Activation of ethical consumption</td>
<td>Constructing a deep relationship between consumer and producer</td>
<td>Constructing the circular system of production and consumption involving popular appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Period</strong></td>
<td>2010.07--------2011.09---------2012.03---------2012.09--------2013.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group</strong></td>
<td>Group 1, 2</td>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Group 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan</strong></td>
<td>- Making a young campaign group: Initiate the activities with an active mind</td>
<td>- Archiving and offering information on the website</td>
<td>- Offering information regarding our daily lives</td>
<td>- Understanding social firms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Utilising diversified media such as SNS</td>
<td>- Offering information about practical aspects of ethical consumption</td>
<td>- Understanding the role of responsible consumers</td>
<td>- Introducing other ethical consumption campaign groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3  Observation and interview schedules

3.1 Observation schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type of activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12/12/11 First meeting</td>
<td>18 05/03/12 Group 4 planning meeting 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>04/01/12 Small-scale meeting</td>
<td>19 08/03/12 Group 4 planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

15 Some of the previous and existing BORA members gathered and talked about the development and history of the BORA. After that one of the BORA members summarised their discussion and uploaded it on the BORA's blog (see details in [http://bora.asia/120114716381](http://bora.asia/120114716381)).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Meeting No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>05/01/12</td>
<td>Event Vision sharing talk show</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10/03/12</td>
<td>Socialising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>06/01/12</td>
<td>Small-scale meeting</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15/03/12</td>
<td>Group 4 planning meeting 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>07/01/12</td>
<td>Regular gathering</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20/03/12</td>
<td>Group 4 planning meeting 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>09/01/12</td>
<td>Small-scale meeting</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22/03/12</td>
<td>Group 4 planning meeting 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10/01/12</td>
<td>Event Big Issue pre-meeting</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26/03/12</td>
<td>Group 4 planning meeting 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>11/01/12</td>
<td>Event Used book reading club</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>02/04/12</td>
<td>Group 4 planning meeting 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>14/01/12</td>
<td>Event Big Issue pre-educational meeting</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>04/04/12</td>
<td>Group 4 planning meeting 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>16/01/12</td>
<td>Small-scale meeting</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>09/04/12</td>
<td>Group 4 planning meeting 9 Focus group interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>20/01/12</td>
<td>Event WeGeneration book reading club</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12/04/12</td>
<td>New member recruit interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>21/01/12</td>
<td>General gathering</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14/04/12</td>
<td>New group orientation workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>28/01/12</td>
<td>General gathering - Big Issue picket making</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19/04/12</td>
<td>Group 4 small-scale meeting 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>30/01/12</td>
<td>Event Big Issue Big Dom</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26/04/12</td>
<td>Group 4 small-scale meeting 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>04/02/12</td>
<td>General gathering</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>03/05/12</td>
<td>General gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>11/02/12</td>
<td>General gathering</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10/05/12</td>
<td>General gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>18/02/12</td>
<td>General gathering - Group 3’s final meeting</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12/05/12</td>
<td>Fair Trade Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>General gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>General gathering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 3.2 Interview schedule

### 3.2.1 Group 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Dae-Hun</td>
<td>28th June 2012</td>
<td>14:00-15:00</td>
<td>SEEDS office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park, Soo-Wook</td>
<td>7th April 2012</td>
<td>14:46-15:30</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Kyu-Jung</td>
<td>20th April 2012</td>
<td>12:00-13:30</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung, Ko-Yun</td>
<td>9th April 2012</td>
<td>17:00-18:00</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Byung-Kun</td>
<td>19th April 2012</td>
<td>11:15-13:00</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung, Hyun-Soo</td>
<td>12th April 2012</td>
<td>11:30-13:00</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song, Ji-Ae</td>
<td>23rd April 2012</td>
<td>16:20-17:28</td>
<td>A franchise café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shin, Eun-Jong</td>
<td>12th May 2012</td>
<td>10:40-12:03</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Hwa-Jin</td>
<td>27th April 2012</td>
<td>15:10-16:16</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong, Yoo-Ri</td>
<td>3rd May 2012</td>
<td>18:24-19:29</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2.2 Group 4

#### 3.2.2.1 1st Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Sung-Kyung</td>
<td>24th April 2012</td>
<td>11:36-13:00</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bae, Joo-Sun</td>
<td>27th April 2012</td>
<td>13:10-14:17</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won, Yoo-Joo</td>
<td>25th April 2012</td>
<td>12:40-13:40</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho, Jung-Eun</td>
<td>26th April 2012</td>
<td>11:30-12:22</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho, Young-Soo</td>
<td>1st May 2012</td>
<td>12:11-13:11</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung, Ba-Ram</td>
<td>26th April 2012</td>
<td>13:15-14:35</td>
<td>A private owned cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park, So-Yeol</td>
<td>27th April 2012</td>
<td>16:35-17:37</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noh, Yoo-Jung</td>
<td>23rd April 2012</td>
<td>12:20-13:50</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choo, Ki-A</td>
<td>30th April 2012</td>
<td>18:00-19:26</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.2.2.2 2nd Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Sung-Kyung</td>
<td>27th June 2012</td>
<td>16:30-17:30</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bae, Joo-Sun</td>
<td>28th June 2012</td>
<td>13:05-14:00</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won, Yoo-Joo</td>
<td>28th June 2012</td>
<td>19:00-19:40</td>
<td>SEEDS office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho, Jung-Eun</td>
<td>26th June 2012</td>
<td>12:25-13:40</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho, Young-Soo</td>
<td>26th June 2012</td>
<td>14:10-15:06</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Sook-Yeon</td>
<td>25th June 2012</td>
<td>13:50-14:50</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung, Ba-Ram</td>
<td>28th June 2012</td>
<td>15:55-17:12</td>
<td>A non-franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park, So-Yeol</td>
<td>25th June 2012</td>
<td>11:30-12:40</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noh, Yoo-Jung</td>
<td>27th June 2012</td>
<td>14:05-15:21</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choo, Ki-A</td>
<td>27th June 2012</td>
<td>17:43-18:34</td>
<td>A franchise cafe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Consent forms

4.1 Observation consent form

This is Min-Hye Lee who is a PhD candidate at the University of Leicester, School of Management. My research is to explore and understand how consumers present themselves by choosing particular goods and looking at how these goods are used. In particular this research focuses on consumption of individuals who are involved in the group ‘BORA’.

I as a researcher will participate in and observe the BORA’s planned/unplanned activities from January 2012 to April 2012. During the observation session, I will take notes about the experiences including what I’ve observed, listened to or seen. Some photographs or videos will be taken during the observation session in order to capture and preserve the atmosphere of the activities. If you choose not to take photos or videos, please let me know.

During the observation session, if you feel uncomfortable in any stages, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. All collected data will only be used in an academic purpose. You will be able to get access the complete thesis when the study terminates. The thesis will only be written in English.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at mhl12@le.ac.uk. I do appreciate your participation.

1. I confirm that I am over 18.
2. I confirm that I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Ms Min-Hye Lee.

3. I agree that Ms Min-Hye Lee will participate in the BORA’s activities in order to collect the data for her PhD study.

4. I agree that some photos or videos will be taken during the observation.

5. I agree that the photos or videos taken during the observation will be used in any academic publications.

6. I would like to have a copy of this research when the research is completed. (if yes, please put your email address)

7. I have read, understand, and agree to the above statement.

Date: ___________________  Participant’s Signature: ______________________

---

4.2 Interview consent form

This is Min-Hye Lee who is a PhD candidate at the University of Leicester, School of Management. My research is to explore and understand how consumers present themselves by choosing particular goods and looking at how these goods are used. In particular this research focuses on consumption of individuals who are involved in the group ‘BORA’.

I will conduct interviews in order to listen to your stories or opinions about your consumption and the relevant activities. You may talk about your own experiences of them in a personal level as well as a group level. You will be one of the interviewees among 20 interviewees. Each interview will last an hour and you will choose the interview place. During the interview session, if you feel uncomfortable in any stages (even though the interview does not include any dangerous factors), feel free to decline to answer any question or terminate the interview.

Interviews will be recorded by the researcher using a smart phone. Some photographs will be taken during the interview if necessary. If you choose not to take photos, please let me know.

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. Individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. All collected data will only be used in an academic purpose. You will be able to get access the complete thesis when the study terminates. The thesis will only be written in English.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at mhl12@le.ac.uk. I do appreciate your participation.
1. I confirm that I am over 18.

2. I confirm that I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Ms Min-Hye Lee.

3. I agree that the interview will be audio-recorded.

4. I agree that some photos will be taken during the interview.

5. I agree that the photos taken during the interview will be used in any academic publications.

6. I understand that information collected in this study is confidential.

7. I would like to have a copy of this research when the research is completed. (if yes, please put your email address)

8. I have read, understand, and agree to the above statement.

Date: _____________________________  Participant’s Signature: _____________________

5 List of interviewees

5.1 Group 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>The future career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Dae-Hun</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>An employee of the SEEDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park, Soo-Wook</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>University Student, Hang-Yang University (Management)</td>
<td>Not decided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Kyu-Jung</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>University Student, Korea University (Management)</td>
<td>Not decided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung, Ko-Yun</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>University student, SungKwonKwan University (France language and literature)</td>
<td>NGO or Social company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Byung-Kun</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>University Student, Dong-Kuk University (Chemical Engineering)</td>
<td>Social company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung, Hyun-Soo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>University Student, Sung-Sin Women’s University (Social Welfare)</td>
<td>Social company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Year of Birth</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>The future career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song, Ji-Ae</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>University Student, Kyung-Hee University (Trade)</td>
<td>Trade or marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shin, Eun-Jong</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>University Student, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (Russian)</td>
<td>Social company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Hwa-Jin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>University Student, Ewha Women’s University (French Language and Literature)</td>
<td>UN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong, Yoo-Ri</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>University Student, Ewha Women’s University (Chinese Language and Literature)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Group 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>The future career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Sung-Kyung</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Running a handicraft workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bae, Joo-Sun</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>University Student, Sung-Sin Women’s University (Consumption Studies)</td>
<td>The distribution industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won, Yoo-Joo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Welfare for the aged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho, Jung-Eun</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>University Student, Kuk-Min University (English Language and Literature)</td>
<td>Social company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho, Young-Soo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>University Student, Hong-Ik University (Visual arts and design)</td>
<td>Non-profit organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Sook-Yeon</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>University Student, Kuk-Min University (English Language and Literature)</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung, Ba-Ram</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>University Student, Kyung-Hee University (Trade)</td>
<td>Fair Trade industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Role/Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park, So-Yeol</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>University Student, Catholic University</td>
<td>Social company or ethical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Sociology)</td>
<td>consumption related firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noh, Yoo-Jung</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>University Student, Han-Kyung University</td>
<td>Colour selector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Visual arts and design)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choo, Ki-A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>University Student, Seoul Women’s</td>
<td>NGO or social company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University (English Language and Literature)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


Animal Rights UK (2014), “Anti-Fur Weekend of Action Against Burberry” (Online), Available at: http://animalrightsuk.org/index.html (accessed 06/02/14)


BBC (2009), “The politics of UK newspapers” (Online), Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8282189.stm (accessed 13/01/14)


Bhattacherjee, A. (2012), “Social Science Research: Principles, Methods and Practices” (Online), Available at:
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=oa_textbooks (accessed 07/01/13)


Press.


1495-1519.


Chemin, A. (2014), “France remains faithful to food as meals continue to be a collective affair” (online), Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/apr/07/france-food-ritual-meal-tradition (accessed 05/04/14)


Consumer VOICE (2013), “Consumer voice” (Online), Available at: http://www.consumer-voice.org/About-Voice.aspx (accessed 15/ 02/ 14)


Dalrymple, T. (2012), “Why second-hand bookshops are just my type” (online), Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/9715377/Why-second-hand-bookshops-are-just-my-type.html (accessed 04/03/14)


Deloitte (2013), “Deloitte Consumer Review: Consumers demand active role in future of their high street” (Online), Available at: http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_GB/uk/9f615183b2e52410VgnVCM2000003356f70aRCRD.htm (accessed 15/02/14)


Dingankar, M. (2010), “An Overview of South Korean politics” (Online), Available at: http://idsa.in/idsacommets/AnOverviewofSouthKoreanpolitics_mdingankar_010710 (accessed 30/ 05/ 14)


ESRC (2014), “What is social science?” (Online), Available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/what-is-social-science/index.aspx (accessed 04/02/14)

wider-audience-and-still-be-exclusive.html (accessed 19/04/14)

Ethical Consumer (2011a), “Ethical shopping and price” (Online), Available at:
http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/commentanalysis/consumerism/thepriceofethics.aspx (accessed 08/07/14)

Ethical Consumer (2011b), “Nike admits problems at Converse factory in Indonesia.”
(Online) Available at:

Ethical Consumer (2014), “Moving from the margins to mainstream” (Online),
Available at:
http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/aboutus/20thbirthday/frommargintomainstream.aspx (accessed 21/07/14)

Ethical Consumer Research Association Ltd. (2013), “Ethical Consumer list of
consumer boycotts” (Online), Available at:
http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/boycotts/boycottslist.aspx (accessed 21/01/14)


Publications Ltd.

Feigenbaum, E. (2014), “Rules and Regulations of Nonprofit Organisations” (Online),
Available at: http://org.enom.com/rules-regulations-nonprofit-organizations- 348.html (accessed 10/01/14)


GKU (2000), “Green Korea United” (Online), Available at: http://www.greenkorea.org/?page_id=5327 (accessed 17/ 04/ 14)


No. 4, pp. 294-304.


Han, S. H. (2014), “Ethical consumption is even possible in Home Shopping” (Online), Available at: http://news.heraldcorp.com/view.php?ud=20140530000077&md=20140602004846 _BK (accessed 17/ 06/ 14)


Jang, W. J. (2014), “The rate of university entrance in Switzerland is 29% but 71% in Korea. However what is the secret of low rate of unemployment in Switzerland?” (Online), Available at: http://news.donga.com/3/all/20140120/60294031/1 (accessed 22/ 01/ 14)


Jones, M. (2013), “Ethnographic and Field Study Techniques” (Online), Available at: https://camtools.cam.ac.uk/wiki/site/e30faf26-bc0c-4533-acbc-cff4f9234e1b/ethnographic%20and%20field%20study.html (accessed 01/11/13).


Kantor, J. (2014), “A Look at Korea’s Culture From the Bathhouse” (Online), Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/travel/a-look-at-koreas-culture-from-the-bathhouse.html?_r=0 (accessed 04/ 04/ 14)


Kookje Newspaper (2014), “Samsung Electronics has ranked first for last 6 years in the
most attractive companies to work” (Online), Available at: http://www.kookje.co.kr/news2011/asp/newsbody.asp?code=0200&key=20140321.99002100434 (accessed 05/06/14)

Korea Social Science Data Archive: KOSSDA (2010), “A view of the present situation and usage of qualitative data in Korea” (Online), Available at: http://kossda.tistory.com/13 (accessed 12/11/12)


Lee, J. B. (2012), “Seoul has the first step to become a Fair Trade city.” (Online), Available at: http://www.icoop.or.kr/v2/announce/view.php?code=announce&fid=1448&homepage=003&number=5544 (accessed 03/06/14)


Lee, S. K. (2012), “Other things being equal, choose the better one; Brands and Consumers focus on the concept of ‘good’” (Online), Available at: http://bntnews.hankyung.com/apps/news?popup=0&nid=03&c1=03&c2=03&c3=00&nkey=201212200835583&mode=sub_view (accessed 17/06/14)

Lee, W. J. (2009), “Power of Ethical Consumption: On the Path to Good and Robust Economy” (Online), Available at: http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/economy/heri_review/341286.html (accessed 17/06/14)

Lee, W. J. (2012), “Social Economy for 99%... If Seoul leads the trend, the whole country can change” (Online), Available at: http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/economy/heri_review/522148.html (accessed 11/03/13)


Moon, H. I. (2014), “Ramen firms focus on the ‘Modisumer’ Marketing” (Online), Available at: http://www.mt.co.kr/view/mtview.php?type=1&no=201401191194629982&outlink=1 (accessed 06/02/14)


Newkey-Burden, C. (2008), “Why I hate second-hand books” (online), Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2008/jun/19/whyihatesecondhandbooks (accessed 04/ 03/ 14)


Oxford Dictionaries (2014b), “Inconspicuous” (Online), Available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/inconspicuous (accessed 20/ 04/ 14)

Oxford Dictionaries (2014c), “Prosumer” (Online), Available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/prosumer (accessed 09/ 04/ 14)


Park, H. J. and Burns, L. D. (2005), “Fashion orientation, credit card use, and


309


“Researching Society and Culture”, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.


London: Routledge.


Sellgren, K. (2013), ‘Professional parents ‘move for good schools’.” (Online), Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-25415231 (accessed 03/02/14)


Stanford University (2004), “What is democracy?” (Online), Available at: http://www.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhaIsDemocracy012004.htm (accessed 04/02/14)


The Beautiful Foundation (2012), “Beautiful Foundation” (Online), Available at: http://www.beautifulfund.org/ (accessed 15/03/13)

The Beautiful Store (2014), “About the Beautiful Store” (Online), Available at: http://www.beautifulstore.org/Eng/about/socialenterprise.aspx (accessed 12/02/14)

The BORA (2012), “The meaning of the name, BORA” (online) Available at: http://cafe.naver.com/borabomb (accessed 12/07/13)


The Economist (2004), “Luxury’s new empire: Are the Chinese replacing the Japanese as the world’s most fanatical shoppers?” (Online), Available at: http://www.economist.com/node/2771531 (accessed 31/01/14)

The Economist (2005), “Inconspicuous consumption” (Online), Available at: http://www.economist.com/node/5323772 (accessed 07/07/14)


The Hankyoreh (2009), “Good coffee, Good clothes… meet ‘Good Consumers’” (Online), Available at: http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/economy/economy_general/354200.html (accessed 10/
The Hankyoreh (2014), “About us” (Online), Available at: http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/ENGLISH/introduction.html (accessed 13/ 01/ 14)


The University of Michigan (2010), “The Interdisciplinary Science of Consumption: Mechanisms of Allocating Resources Across Disciplines” (Online), Available at: http://sustainability.umich.edu/events/interdisciplinary-science-consumption-mechanisms-allocating-resources-across-disciplines (accessed 04/ 02/ 14)


Thornton, S. (1997), “The social logic of subcultural capital”, In Gelder, K. and

Traidcraft (2014), “The Fairtrade Mark” (Online), Available at: http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/about_traidcraft/faq/fairtrade_mark (accessed 01/07/14)


