UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING THROUGH THE LENS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: AN EXPLORATORY FRAMEWORK

ABSTRACT

Drawing on literature into ethical consumerism, we present a framework for understanding the motivations underpinning the decision to volunteers overseas. The framework identifies four categories of motivations for accepting an international volunteer placement: belonging to a community (conformity), being perceived as unique (self-orientation), achieving something positive for others (self-actualisation), and wanting something for one self (hedonism). The framework suggests that international volunteers may be more motivated by social factors than current research suggests.

Keywords: volunteers, NGOs, not-for-profit marketing, consumer behaviour.

A number of researchers envisage a future where job insecurity is the norm; where work is increasingly 'precarious' (e.g. Kalleberg 2009) and careers are boundaryless (DiRenzo & Greenhaus 2011). Evidence of such a future already exists. The dynamism inherent in a globalised world has changed the psychological contract between workers and employers (Smithson & Lewis 2000). Under pressure to remain flexible, employers are less willing, and likely, to offer job security, vertical career advancement, or structured professional development for workers (e.g. Cappelli 2006). Individual workers, for their part, must underwrite their employability by developing their human, professional and social capital (Smith 2010). Yet against this backdrop, and amidst a global financial downturn, growing numbers of workers from a multitude of professions and ages are choosing to undertake international volunteer placements, both within corporate volunteer programs (e.g. The Economist 2010) and independently through international volunteer agencies (Randel, German, Cordiero & Baker 2004). On the surface, this seems counter-intuitive. Unlike domestic volunteers who can retain an existing income stream, career presence, social networks, and lifestyle, international volunteers forego these in order to achieve their volunteering ambitions. Thus, the decision to volunteer internationally is imbued with substantial opportunity costs.

In this paper we seek to understand this phenomenon by asking the question 'Are international volunteers ethical consumers?' In other words, are the forces that motivate a professional person to devote 1-2 years of their life volunteering overseas similar to those of a consumer purchasing an ethical product or service? The continuing growth in consumption of ethical products and services is well documented, and, like international volunteering, appears relatively unimpeded by work insecurity and the global economic turmoil (Flatters & Willmott 2009; Hughes 2011 forthcoming). Marketers have observed an emerging type of consumer whose values dictate a new approach to products and consumption: the ethical consumers. For instance, the Green Brands Survey 2011, published by WPP [1] , shows continued growing interest in purchasing from environmentally sustainable companies. The study of more than 9 000 people in 8 countries revealed a breadth of ethical priorities, ranging from climate change to waste reduction and water management.This market includes people seeking more quality and equality in the products they buy. They are motivated by novelty, security and social interactions and, thus, represent a new profile of buyers.

To help us better understand the similarities and differences between the motivations of ethical consumers and international volunteers, we take an interdisciplinary perspective that binds the two streams of research. Both streams sit within broader research domains - consumer behaviour and expatriation respectively - that, while central to contemporary business and management research, are rarely combined. From this amalgamation, we develop a framework that, we believe, captures the unique social and individual forces influencing the decision to volunteer overseas.

It is clear that the two sets of literature share parallels on several levels. For a start, both have been previously viewed by researchers as a niche field of study within their broader domain, but have gained greater prominence in recent years due to changing mainstream attitudes towards ethical careers and consumption (e.g. Cook & Jackson 2006; Hills & Mahmud 2007; Parkins & Craig 2006). Both international volunteers and ethical consumers help to develop people and countries for a better

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[1] For a summary, see: http://www.cohnwolfe.com/en/ideas-insights/white-papers/green-brands-survey-2011 [accessed 19 July 2011]

life, and in the process 'humanize' (Lewis 2006: 15) the consumption process. In both cases, substantial barriers exist for the decision maker. For volunteers, these relate to the (very) high professional, financial and social opportunity costs, while ethical consumers deal with paying higher prices and navigating limited information, product availability and convenience (e.g. De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp 2005; Hustinx & Lammertyn 2003; Low & Davenport 2005; Pearce 1999; Van Til 1988). Both activities bring ordinary people, consciously or otherwise, into overt political activities (e.g. Newholm & Shaw 2007). Whereas ethical consumers 'put their money where their morals are' (Cowe & Williams 2010: 2), volunteers put their careers, or at least a substantial part of it, where their morals are. Given these many similarities, it is surprising that no attempt has been made to integrate the two domains until now.

We believe that this interdisciplinary approach offers the potential for new insights for both domains. For the volunteer sector, it can expand the understanding of international volunteers' motivations in a 'language' familiar to recruiters and marketers. Given that contemporary volunteers are more transient and less committed to the organisation - what Hustinx (2010) terms 'revolving door' or 'plug in' volunteers - understanding their motivations and constructing placements that meet their multiple objectives is becoming increasing important. Conversely, we also believe that viewing ethical career decisions like those made by international volunteers as consumption choices may assist marketers to better understand the motivations for ethical consumption decisions more broadly. This is especially true in relation to motivations for consumption of ethical services, about which limited research exists, and which bear the most similarities to the 'consumption' decisions made by international volunteers.

The three remaining sections of this paper are organised as follows. First, we review and compare extant literature relating to motivations for international volunteering, on the one hand, and for ethical consumption on the other. Next, we integrate this literature and, in doing so, identify and explain a taxonomy of motivations for volunteering from an ethical consumption perspective. Finally, we discuss the implications of the framework to practice and research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of international volunteering vary (Polonijo-King, 2004), even within domains of interest, and often excluded from published research (Sherraden, et al. 2008) making comparisons of studies difficult. We define international volunteers as highly skilled professionals who travel to other countries, usually developing countries, to work on projects designed to help alleviate poverty and achieve positive sustainable development (adapted from Thomas 2002: 21). Most internationals volunteers are, in fact, remunerated for their work, albeit well below what their expertise would demand in their home country. While actual numbers are hard to calculate, it is estimated that almost 30 000 aid organisations exist globally offering such positions (Hudson & Inkson 2006). Along with growing professionalism among volunteer agencies and placements (Myers 2004), studies have documented changes in the nature of volunteers, with increases reported in the number of volunteers who are older (The Economist 2000), more highly educated, and possessing professional expertise and experience, including managers, accountants, and business consultants (e.g. Cook & Jackson 2006; Hoar 2004).

Research examining the motivations of international volunteers, while lacking a theoretical base, build on models of domestic volunteering, that highlight the complex and multifarious motives for volunteering and pro-social behaviour more broadly (e.g. Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Miene & Haugen 1994; Yeung 2004). Whereas volunteering overseas was once associated with (often long-term) membership to institutions like religious and political bodies (Smith 1981), the past ten years have seen increases in volunteers who are more purposeful, seeking tangible personal outcomes from their placement (Hustinx & Lammertyn 2003). Labelled 'altruistic individualist' (Rehberg 2005), they are able to combine compassion and a sense of duty with more individualistic self-directed motives (Hustinx & Lammertyn 2003). In brief, whereas volunteering overseas was once a moral choice, research suggests that volunteers are increasingly more pragmatic in their decision making.

Among the major motivational forces reported by international volunteers (e.g. McDrew 2006; Rehberg 2005) are *altruism* (e.g. sharing skills, giving something back), *personal development* or

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benefit (e.g. personal or professional development), and *experience* (e.g. challenge, excitement). By way of example, an Australian study of returned volunteers (Brook, Missingham, Hocking & Fifer 2007: 13) reported that a range of 'often complex and multifaceted' motivations were presented, including doing something useful (55% of respondents), adventure or travel (24%), seeking something new (10%) and personal change (5%). Similarly, in interviews with 48 New Zealand volunteers at the pre-departure stage, (Hudson & Inkson 2006), the major reasons given were altruism (sharing skills, giving something back), the challenge and adventure of a new experience, and a change in life. Separate studies have suggested that between 10-15% of volunteers cite work-related reasons or skill development (Brook et al. 2007; Cook & Jackson 2006; Hudson & Inkson 2006) as a motivating factor in their decision to volunteer overseas.

We now turn to research on ethical consumption, which emerged from the environment movement in the 1970s (Newholm & Shaw 2007). Definitions of ethical consumers have expanded from the narrower concept of the 'green consumer' (Freestone & McGoldrick 2008) to include consumers who purchase products or services because of their ethical, rather than solely environmental, benefits. The term 'ethical' here covers myriad matters of conscience such as animal welfare and fair trade, social aspects such as labour standards, as well as more self-interested health concerns behind the growth of organic food sales (Newholm & Shaw 2007). Most research appears to focus on consumers' motives for relatively minor ethical purchases like perishable foods (e.g. Brown, Dury & Holsworth 2009), rather than ethical consumption decisions that involve high-value purchases and require a higher degree of commitment from the individual (e.g. purchasing real estate or motor vehicles, making long-term investment or career decisions).

Like research into international volunteers, studies of the motivations for ethical consumption highlight its complexity arising from the heterogeneity among consumers and their vision of ethics and ethical products. (e.g. Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence & K. 2002; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, Shaw & Shiu 2006; Shaw & Newholm 2002). This is not surprising given the diversity of ethical products and services available (Cowe & Williams 2010). Similarly, although there still exists a lack of clarity

about the motives which lead consumers to buy ethical products (e.g. Freestone & McGoldrick 2008), research suggest that a combination of altruistic- and self-interests play a role in motivating ethical consumption (Freestone & McGoldrick 2008). The consumer behaviour literature recognises the 'experiential' aspects of consumption as motivating forces (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Okada 2005), and while this is implicitly picked up in international volunteer literature (Rehberg 2005), the experiential motivations of ethical consumption emerge primarily in literature relating to eco-tourism (Galley & Clifton 2004; Weaver 2001) and volunteer tourism [2] (e.g. Brown & Morrison 2003; Callanan & Thomas 2005), perhaps the only substantial research into the consumption of ethical services.

One notable distinction between the two strands of research is recognition of the degree to which people's motivations are not individualised at all, but are embedded in networks of sociability. Consumer behaviour researchers have long recognised the symbolic importance of consumption decisions (Levy 1959). Symbolic consumption offers symbolic value by expressing a meaning to significant others (Grubb & Grathwohl 1967), and this benefits the individual through enhanced self-concept and social recognition (Cherrier 2007). This attention to self-concept can occur at different levels: for instance, how one would like to be, how one believes one is perceived, how one would like to be perceived, or how one thinks others perceive them. What this arm of research highlights is the social nature of the consumption decision; motivation is also influenced by the perception we have of how others will appraise or view our choice.

This theme is picked up in research into ethical consumption, which highlights the importance of externally-directed self-concept and status attached to ethical brands and ethical consumption decisions (e.g. Freestone & McGoldrick 2008; Newholm & Shaw 2007). Rather than simply pro-

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[2] While ostensibly a volunteer placement, volunteer tourism involves a customer (volunteer) purchasing a volunteer experience. Agencies recruiting tourism volunteers emphasise the international experience and cross-cultural understanding to be gained by the, usually young and inexperienced, volunteers (e.g. Sherraden et al. 2008). Like Rieffel and Zalud (2006) we differentiate these programs in which volunteers pay a fee and are selected based solely on their commitment to overseas service (e.g. EarthWatch Institute), from 'professional' placements like Médecins Sans Frontières which attract skilled professionals with substantial work experience.

social motives (i.e. interest in doing good for others), ethical consumption can be motivated by social needs attached to the consumers' collective identity through, for example, being part of a social movement (e.g. Cherrier 2007). Similarly, this importance placed on social influences is mirrored in current understandings of career and/or employer choice (e.g. Lent, Brown & Hackett 1995), as well as studies of domestic volunteering and other pro-social behaviour (e.g. Andreoni & Petire 2004; Ariely, Bracha & Meier 2009; Haley & Fessler 2005), much of which draws on experimental manipulations. However, these social aspects are lacking in mainstream studies of international volunteers' motivations, which tend to rely on self-report, usually qualitative and often retrospective, data (e.g. Brook et al. 2007). In short, a broader survey of the literature suggests that the decision to volunteer internationally is likely shaped by concerns that are not reducible to either altruism or simple utilitarian self-interest.

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING OVERSEAS

The many similarities between international volunteers and ethical consumers identified above suggest that both 'consumption' decisions may share similar motivational roots. Drawing on the review of the literature, and using terminology found in research of human motivations, we distil two dimensions that shape motivations to volunteer overseas. These are represented visually as the horizontal and vertical axes in Figure 1.

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The first of these dimensions (vertical axis) is the extent to which the motivation is externally directed toward others (*social*) or internally-directed, independent of what other people think (*non-social*). Social influence stems from a person's perception of how relevant others will perceive their behaviour (e.g. Pavlou & Fygenson 2006). At the *social* end of the continuum, decisions are influenced by group norms. Comparison to or compliance with such norms is an important motivation to individuals who

seek confirmation from reference members of the group. In contrast, individuals with *non-social* motivations act independently, following their own norms about what is right or good to do. Hence, *social* motivations are externally directed and relate to other individuals, while *non-social* motivations are not based on other people's judgment. The second dimension (horizontal axis) is the extent to which the motivation is oriented towards the self and one's individual benefits (*individualistic*), or towards others and the collective good (*collectivist*). People with *individualistic* motivations are most concerned with their own welfare, instead of the group welfare. In contrast, *collectivist* motives stimulate individuals to associate their behaviour with, and direct their behaviour towards, a group.

From these two dimensions, we identify four categories of motivations applicable to both ethical consumption and international volunteering: (1) conformity (social, collectivist motives), (2) self-orientation (social, individualistic motives), (3) self-actualisation (non-social, collectivist motives), and (4) hedonism (non-social, individualistic motives). These categories are represented visually as the four quadrants in Figure 1 and explained in more detail below. In line with the research reviewed above, we suggest that, rather than being motivated by a single factor, people's motivations for ethical consumption, including volunteering, are shaped by a combination of these factors, although for each ethical consumption decision one of the four motivational forces is likely to take precedence.

1. Conformity motivations: Conformity motivations are underpinned by the desire to belong. Rather than seeking personal benefit, individuals are motivated by the needs of a group to which they wish to be associated. This motivation stems from the desire to be accepted to the group, and to be perceived as 'one of them' as a result of the decision. Even though consumers might not be personally convinced of the importance or the benefits of the behaviour, they are motivated to do it as a way to adapt to the norms established by the group. It is acceptance to a particular group that most motivates individuals in this category. Conformity motives may stem from socio-cultural pressures. For instance, a graduate whose peers have accepted a Peace Corps posting rather than gap year travel may feel peer pressure to do the same. Similarly, given growing numbers of current and returned international volunteers in society and in the workplace, and hence a larger and broader 'reference group', it would

be reasonable to expect an increase in conformity motivations for international volunteering. It is also likely that conformity pressures will be strongest in cultures where consistency with social norms is a powerful motivation – for example, highly collectivist cultures (Hofstede 1997).

2. *Self-orientation motivations*: Self-orientation motivations are influenced by personal relevance; in other words, the extent to which the decision has a direct bearing on the self and 'self concept', or the way individuals think that they are perceived by others (Freestone & McGoldrick 2008). Unlike conformity motivations, where people seek to build an image consistent with the group's values, individuals motivated by self-orientation seek to differentiate themselves. Hence, while the group is a powerful reference point (i.e. social), the individual is concerned primarily with creating a unique image that is distinct from the group (i.e. individualistic). It is the desire for self-respect stemming from a process of social comparison that leads the individual be seek this uniqueness (e.g. being seen to do 'good' or act ethically). Thus, while the benefit is primarily internal, it is derived from external approval or status.

Individuals with self-orientation motives buy ethical products because they want to acquire a specific status within a group, and be perceived as someone special and respected, and perhaps an innovator. Similarly, international volunteers within this category will seek terminal and instrumental benefits from their decision; for instance, the social status afforded by peers or family members, or the perceived uniqueness that their volunteer placement will make to their resumé. The perceived 'brand' of the organisation, or even the host country, within which the volunteer works may contribute towards perceptions of uniqueness, and so self-orientation motivations. In contrast to conformity motivations, we expect self-orientation motivations to be strongest in cultures where individualism is highly valued (Hofstede 1997).

3. *Self-actualisation motivations*: Self-actualisation motivations are those in which the individual seeks self-fulfilment and an enriching experience from the ethical consumption (Goldstein 1995; Maslow 1943). Drawing on Maslow's conception of a self-actualised individual, people with self-

actualisation motives are driven by growth, rather than a (perceived) deficiency. They seek the experience for egoless, selfless, detached reasons, and so fulfilling the needs has underlying altruistic motivations. A defining element of this category is that the individual seeks to help others rather than themselves, and so improved welfare for others is the primary outcome.

The self-actualising motivation is the one most closely associated with the stereotypical 'altruistic' international volunteer, who may be motivated by a sense of responsibility to help others less fortunate, to share skills, or to achieve/accomplish a specific outcome (e.g. contribute toward a better world). This motivation is intrinsic and so is an end-experience, rather than a means experience; that is, the self-actualising experience is sufficient in itself rather than being instrumental (i.e. for the sake of achieving another goal).

4. Hedonism motivations: In contrast to self-actualisation motivations, individuals with hedonism motivations are driven by the need for individual enjoyment or pleasure (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982). That is, the behaviour allows the consumer to feel good. The behaviour is used to advance the desire for sensory or cognitive stimulation, with the ethical aspect of the purchase producing a higher level of enjoyment, novelty, interest or excitement. A key feature of hedonism motivations for ethical consumption is the desire for immediate rather than delayed benefit (Chan & Mukhopadhyay 2010). The overarching motivation is *feeling* good, rather than doing good, and it is the quality of the service or product received that is paramount as opposed to the collective benefit (i.e. individualistic rather than collective).

We suggest at least three forms of hedonism motivations may be evident among international volunteers:

1. *Hedonistic usage motivations*, in which the volunteer is motivated by seeking personal enrichment. This would include volunteers seeking to use a placement in order to extend their professional experience, gain practical job skills, or learn a new language (e.g. Brook et al. 2007);

2. *Hedonistic consumption motivations*, whereby the volunteer seeks to experience something new or different in life; for example 'quest for life' (Rehberg 2005: 116). For this group, it is the stimulation or excitement of the experience of volunteering, perhaps in comparison to their 'usual' careers, that motivates; and

3. *Hedonistic feeling motivations*, in which the volunteer is motivated by the personal (intrinsic) reward derived from doing good. This stems from the sense of achievement of the work. Unlike self-actualisation motivations, where the motivating achievement comes from helping others, hedonistic feeling motivations are primarily internal; in effect, feeling good, rather than being good (see, for instance, Bruyere & Rappe 2007).

DISCUSSION

This paper has examined the motivations for international volunteering thorough the lens of ethical consumption. By doing so, it presents a framework for understanding the motivations of international volunteers that incorporates altruistic, individual, and social aspects.

We believe that the framework extends understanding of international volunteer motivations in a number of ways. Several researchers have highlighted the benefit of understanding the multifarious motivations for volunteering. Bussell and Forbes (2002) are perhaps the most explicit in arguing that this could lead to more targeted recruitment and retention strategies. International volunteer agencies are increasingly competing with each other and with the corporate sector, and so face pressure to be more business-like in the way they manage all aspects of their operations, including recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers (Ryan 1999). In this environment, understanding the motivations and needs of volunteer staff is critical to the ability of these organisations to attract (Clary et al. 1994) and retain (Houle, Sagarin & Kaplan 2005) volunteers and hence continue to provide the services that they do (Hibbert, Piacentini & Dajani 2003). The framework highlights potential opportunities and challenges facing volunteer agencies. For example, if a volunteer is motivated by achieving self-actualising experiences, organisations face the challenge of structuring a volunteer placement that
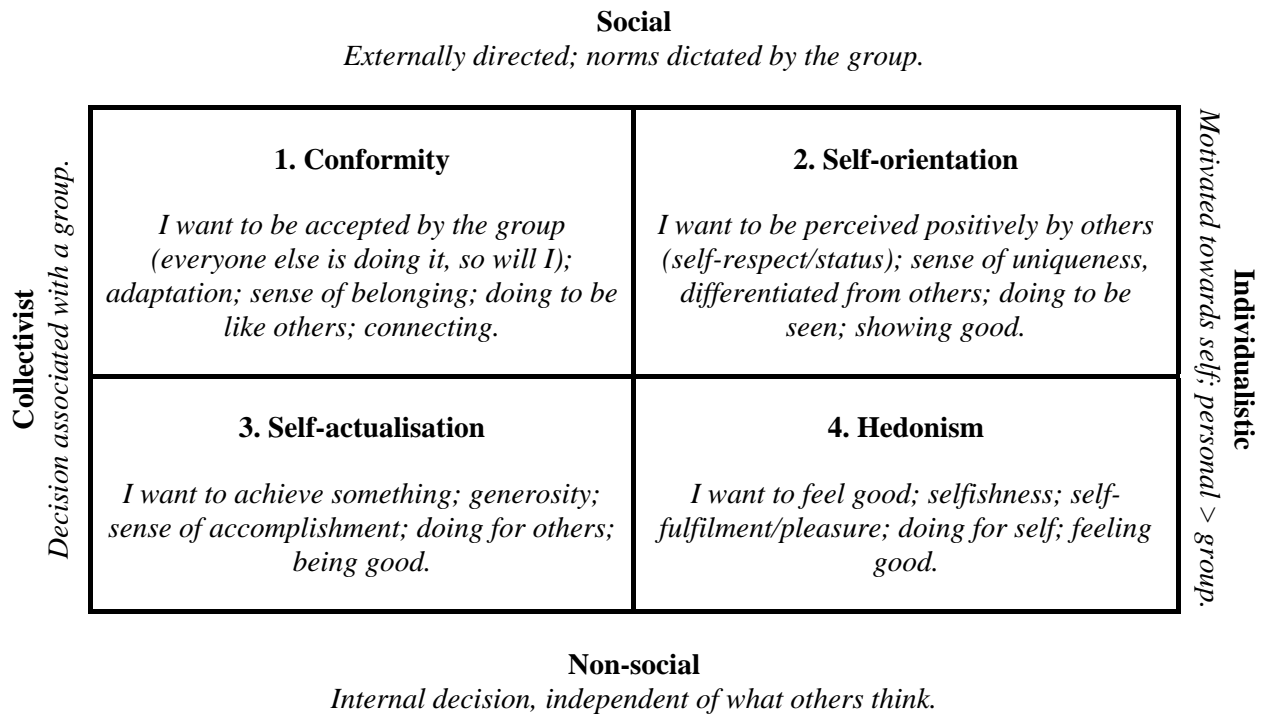
provides sufficient opportunities for this (e.g. a position with opportunities for creative expression, or interaction with people that provides development and growth).

The framework makes a unique contribution by highlighting the (potential) social motivations underpinning the decision to volunteer overseas that have, to date, been overlooked. In doing so, we believe that the framework challenges a bias in extant empirical research of international volunteers' motivations towards inductive, self-report data collection methods. While well suited to exploratory studies (Miles & Huberman 1994; Patton 2002), this approach may inadequately capture the social motivations like self-orientation and conformity, which are likely to be sub-conscious or more susceptible to social desirability and self-presentation biases.

This paper also opens the potential to expand the connection between international volunteering and ethical consumption literature further. The discussion outlined here relates to just the first stage of the consumer decision making process (e.g. Hoyer & MacInnis 2001), namely the needs/motivations that instigate consumers to seek products and solutions (problem solving motivation). Examining the mechanisms through which volunteers proceed through the other stages of the 'buying' process, and factors that mediate these, might also unveil useful findings. For instance, what factors do individuals consider when making the judgement about whether to apply for, or accept, an international volunteer placement (judgement), or how do different individuals undertake the search for information relating to volunteer positions (information search)?

Our typology is theoretical and so empirical research is needed to test how adequately the four categories describe the motives of both populations, and as well as unearthing distinctions among them. As noted above, in designing such studies researchers should consider how well respondents could provide meaningful self-report data on some of the motivations identified (e.g. self-orientation). Consequently, the most useful data is likely to come from experimental manipulations or creative interview designs, which may be better able to identify these underlying motives (e.g. Scaeffer 2000).

Figure 1: Framework for understanding the motivations for volunteering overseas (an ethical consumption perspective)

Social
Externally directed; norms dictated by the group.

1. Conformity *I want to be accepted by the group (everyone else is doing it, so will I); adaptation; sense of belonging; doing to be like others; connecting.*	**2. Self-orientation** *I want to be perceived positively by others (self-respect/status); sense of uniqueness, differentiated from others; doing to be seen; showing good.*
3. Self-actualisation *I want to achieve something; generosity; sense of accomplishment; doing for others; being good.*	**4. Hedonism** *I want to feel good; selfishness; self-fulfilment/pleasure; doing for self; feeling good.*

Left axis: **Collectivist** — *Decision associated with a group.*

Right axis: **Individualistic** — *Motivated towards self; personal > group.*

Non-social
Internal decision, independent of what others think.

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UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

THROUGH THE LENS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: AN EXPLORATORY

FRAMEWORK

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