Theories of Delinquency and Deviance Applied to Consumption

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Abstract

As aspects of ethical and moral consumption, this paper is concerned with gaining deeper insights into how people could possibly react to being judged and then labeled delinquent and deviant consumers (i.e., falling short of or neglecting to fulfill their duty to others, other species, and the Earth). To that end, theories of delinquency (rational choice, strain, anomie, social processes, subculture, and differential opportunity) and Henry and Eaton's six degrees of deviance approach were employed to conceptualize this phenomenon. Each theory and degree of deviance is explained and then paired with a consumer example to illustrate its relevance in offering insights into people's possible reactions to being judged and labelled delinquent and deviant consumers. Future researchers are encouraged to operationalize the ideas contained herein to see if they have empirical and theoretical merit.

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Moral disengagement can lead to unethical consumer attitudes and delinquent consumer behaviour (Egan et al., 2015). They explained that "while people generally know right from wrong, some find it easier to disengage from their ethical principles than others" (p. 123); that is, breach their personal ethics when shopping. Reisch and Zhao (2017) posited that consumers "often do not process information extensively in an analytical way. [Instead, they] rely on simple rules to make judgements and decisions" (p. 195) including product or service availability and choice heuristics (i.e., mental shortcuts). This does not bode well for decisions with moral overtones and may set up the need for neutralization techniques.

Neutralization techniques (justifications) "soften or eliminate the impact that norm violating behavior might have upon self-concept and social relationships" (Chatzidakis et al., 2006, p. 693). Drawing on neutralization and delinquency theory has helped researchers better understand the mental strategies that consumers can employ to assuage guilt or deny culpability in harming others, other species, or the Earth through their shopping behaviour (Dootson et al., 2016, 2017; Gruber & Schlegelmilch, 2014; Harris & Daunt, 2011; McGregor, 2008). This conceptual paper explores how using theories of delinquency and deviance can also inform initiatives focused on understanding the phenomenon of unethical consumption *sans* a moral conscience or reduced moral engagement.

Just as neutralization theory may prove useful in "explaining how and why consumers participate in deviant acts" (Harris & Daunt, 2011, p. 849) so too may delinquency and deviance theories. Delinquency means falling short of or neglecting one's duty or obligation. Deviant means diverging sharply from generally accepted standards (Anderson, 2014; Macionis & Gerber, 2010). At their root, delinquent is Latin *delinquere*, 'to offend,' which is Latin *offendere*, 'to strike against.' Deviant is Late Latin *deviantem*, 'turn aside' (Harper, 2022). Delinquent behaviour (neglecting one's duty) is thus deviant (outside the norm) when it differs or turns away from what is expected or desired. It can be construed as offensive when it strikes out against others causing harm (intentional or not).

As a caveat, this paper is not about consumers defrauding retailers and service providers using delinquent or deviant behaviour when engaging in consumer transactions (e.g., theft, misrepresentation, lying, default). It is about the ethics and morality of their consumer behaviour. To that end, readers are asked to remain open to attaching the *delinquent* and *deviant* labels to people who have neglected, not thought out, or ignored the moral and ethical implications of their consumer behaviour on the welfare of themselves, other humans, species, and the planet. They have not lived up to their obligations or normative (should, ought to) expectations when consuming. For clarification, unlike the use of neutralization techniques that happens when people self-judge and rationalize their delinquent or deviant consumer behaviour (Shah & Amjad, 2017), the phenomenon herein pertains to how people might possibly react to being labelled delinquent or deviant after their consumption behavior has been observed and judged by others.

Judging involves forming an opinion or deciding something about someone or something. This opinion can be positive or negative and tendered with or without reasons (McIntosh, 2013). People's reaction to this judgement matters, because it can affect their future behavior. If the judgement opens their eyes to the import of their consumer behaviour, their behaviour could change. If the judgement is not well received, they could continue to engage in and justify unethical and immoral consumer behaviour (Brambilla et al., 2011; Luttrell, 2016). This dynamic may be affected by ethical sensitivity, which is consumers' ability to recognize an ethical issue when they confront it (Chowdhury, 2020). He posited that "ethical sensitivity ... interacts with other personal variables to influence consumers' ethical judgements" (Chowdhury, 2020, p. 428) and perhaps others' judgement of their behaviour.

Morality judgements are very important to the people being judged (Brambilla et al., 2011). A positive moral judgement conveys impressions of correctness and principled behaviour, which is valued in general society (Luttrell, 2016) but not so much in a consumer society (Carrington et al., 2015; McGregor, 2010). Dootson et al. (2018) claimed that consumers especially draw on neutralization techniques when they are striving to "reduce the level of cognitive dissonance associated with performing a deviant act beyond an individuals' deviance threshold" (p. 577). Delinquency and deviant theories are thus proposed as viable theoretical lens onto consumer behaviour.

Theories of Delinquency Applied to Consumption

Several theories explain delinquent behaviour as it pertains to juveniles and criminals: rational choice, strain, anomie, social processes, subculture, and differential opportunity theory (Schmalleger & Marcum, 2019; Shoemaker, 2018; Trappen, 2018) (see Table 1). Each theory is explained and then paired with a consumer example to illustrate its relevance for positing how people might react to their consumer behaviour being judged and labelled delinquent and offensive.

Table 1

Overview of Common Delinquency Theories

Rational Choice Theory – people weigh the pros and cons of a situation and make a decision based on what is available at the time that maximizes benefits and minimizes risks for them

Strain Theory – to alleviate the strain (e.g., pressure, stress, frustration) of trying to succeed, people engage in delinquent behaviour so they can reach their goals

Anomie Theory – when society provides little moral guidance, people turn to delinquent behaviour to deal with feelings of disorganization, frustration, and hopelessness; the delinquent behaviour becomes their norm and stabilizes things

Social Process Theories (e.g., differential association and social learning) – people learn delinquent behaviour (and attendant attitudes, rationalizations, and motives) by interacting with and observing deviants; by association, they can unlearn these behaviours

Subculture Theory – people seek validation for their deviant behaviour in a smaller group within the mainstream culture; their delinquent behaviour is viewed as normal in this subculture (whose beliefs and interests are at variance with the larger culture)

Differential Opportunity Theory – when legitimate means to achieve success are blocked due to missed or missing opportunities, people turn to subcultures to avail different opportunities

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Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory posits that people can make a choice to be delinquent based on what is available to them at the time. They weigh the pros and cons of the situation and decide to act in a way that maximizes benefits and minimizes personal risk (Schmalleger & Marcum, 2019; Trappen, 2018). A consumer might assess their purchase situation (e.g., money at hand, peer pressure, product and service availability) and consciously decide to make an immoral choice because it seemed the *rational* course of action given the circumstances. This choice includes

buying products and services that are some combination of not sustainably and ethically produced, manufactured, distributed, marketed, or retailed.

Carrington et al. (2016) approached the notion of delinquent consumer behaviour from the perspective of the sovereign consumer who makes rational choices. They suggested that "anyone expressing a clear ethical position—such as protecting the environment or preventing child labor—and then failing to enact this ethical conviction through one's consumption choices must be considered delinquent in his or her practice of consumer power" (p. 28). Chatzidakis et al. (2006) were also concerned with how "people cope with the psychological tensions that arise when they behave in ways that are in apparent contradiction to their expressed ethical concerns" (p. 693). The catch is that the person took a clear ethical position and then did not follow through. Consumers can also be judged delinquent in instances when they have not articulated a moral position yet perceive themselves as acting rationally.

From a different perspective, those concerned with moral consumption could frame a rational choice as totally irrational when it is inconsistent with known facts and reality (e.g., unsustainable consumption patterns *are* causing irreparable damage to the planet). Irrational people eschew reason and logic in favour of emotions and are swayed by availability bias, which involves falling back on similar situations without analyzing the present situation or potential consequences. All irrational choices (including consumer choices) are eventually detrimental and harmful (David & Di Giuseppe, 2010); detrimental is Latin *deterere*, 'to wear away, weaken, damage' (Harper, 2022). Such decisions (rationalized or not) have cumulative, often unseen, consequences.

Strain Theory

Strain theory holds that people's inclination to engage in delinquent behaviour depends on the pressure, stress, and frustration (i.e., the strain) they feel while trying to achieve desired societal goals and success. Strain refers to severe or excessive demand on one's strength, abilities, and resources (Anderson, 2014). Strain theorists assume that success is measured in terms of achievements; people feel *strain* when they cannot succeed. To alleviate this strain, they engage in delinquent behaviour, so they can reach their goals and gain a sense of accomplishment and achievement (e.g., use illegal drugs to feel better or beat up a bully to feel safer) (Schmalleger & Marcum, 2019; Shoemaker, 2018; Trappen, 2018).

In a consumer society, success is measured by materialism, which is a tendency to privilege possessions and physical comfort achieved by accumulating goods and services. Materialism is driven by the consumerism ideology (i.e., cultural blueprint comprising beliefs and values of how society should function). When confronted with the pressure to fit into a consumer society, people give in to the strain and spend money (often using credit) to accumulate goods and experience services. They engage in conspicuous consumption and materialism and *want* people to witness their pile of stuff and their lifestyle and judge them as successful. Ironically, taking this approach to relieve stress and strain causes even more stress due to accumulated debt, frustratingly unmet expectations, and having to work more to spend more. A vicious cycle ensues (McGregor, 2010).

Anomie Theory

Anomy is Greek *anomia*, 'without law, lawless' (Harper, 2022). As understood by sociologist Émile Durkheim, "anomie is a social condition in which there is a disintegration or disappearance of the norms and values that were previously common to the society" (Crossman, 2020, para. 1). An extension of strain theory, anomie theory holds that, in societies that highly value success, wealth, and material goods, people's delinquent behaviour may be

prompted by societal conditions that lead to normlessness or shifting norms of what is expected and acceptable behaviour. Such societies lose the ability to maintain social control because there is a discrepancy between commonly professed values and what can actually be achieved in everyday life. In this state of disorganization and lawlessness, people resort to delinquent behaviour to deal with their sense of alienation, hopelessness, and frustration. Under these conditions, delinquent behaviour comes to be viewed as *normal* (e.g., crime, illegal transgressions, corruption) (Shoemaker, 2018; Trappen, 2018).

The consumer society, which measures success by the size and nature of stockpiles of wealth and material goods and services, is rife with "alienation, dissatisfaction, disenchantment, misplaced self-identity, and false relationships" (McGregor, 2010, p. 158). In such a society, "people create a sense of identity [and belonging] through the ownership and display of goods and consumption of services [augmented with narrow connotations of responsibility for whom and what]" (McGregor, 2010, p. 160). Consuming *is* the norm in a consumer society, but this norm is not sustainable. The result is anomie, a condition where society provides little moral guidance (Gerber & Macionis, 2010). People consume with little care for the impact of their decisions except for enhancing their self-interest.

Social Process (Social Learning) Theories

Social process theories assume that social interactions among people, and between people and their environments, can influence delinquent behaviour. One such theory, differential association, holds that delinquency (i.e., falling short of one's duty) is learned during interactions with other deviant people. This socialization includes learning the techniques to engage in the delinquent behaviour as well as any attendant attitudes, rationalizations, and motives. This behaviour (e.g., criminality) can vary in its frequency, duration, intensity, and priority. This theory is concerned with *how* people learn the deviant behaviour not *why* they do so (Schmalleger & Marcum, 2019; Shoemaker, 2018; Trappen, 2018).

Also called social learning, the corollary is that people engaging in delinquent and deviant antisocial behaviour *can* be taught prosocial behaviour (Schmalleger & Marcum, 2019; Trappen, 2018), which is actually quite necessary in a consumer society. By linking their findings to social learning theory, Gruber and Schlegelmilch (2014) concluded that "unsustainable consumption practices could grow further within our society by means of acceptable justifications [because] consumers do learn from and imitate their fellow human beings—not only in terms of their behaviors, but especially in terms of neutralizing patterns" (p. 43).

Fortunately, the social learning approach has already been applied to consumer behaviour by advocating for education that assumes people can learn vicariously by observing others in addition to learning by personally participating in an act (Wals, 2007). If people can learn to consume unethically and unsustainably, they can *also* learn to do otherwise thereby substituting delinquent behaviour with responsible actions. Indeed, Garcia-Ruiz and Rodriguez-Lluesma (2014) contended that ethical consumption can be more than buying ethically sourced products or taking part in consumer-related political and social causes and movements. Ideally, it would be "integrated into the individual's search for a morally good life and contribute to the good of the community in which she lives" (p. 525). This integration would mitigate engaging in consumption warranting a judgement of deviant and delinquent.

Subculture Theory

A subculture represents a smaller group within a larger culture with the former providing an identity for its members that the latter cannot (Schmalleger & Marcum, 2019). According to

delinquent subculture theory, when people realize or perceive that their behaviour does not meet societal standards and norms (e.g., Goth, Punk, New Age, Cosplay), they can seek validation for this behaviour in a subculture where they feel valued and worthy. Feeling abnormal (i.e., deviating from societal norms), they seek a venue for feeling normal. Subcultures provide a place where their delinquent behaviour is expected or typical and considered the norm (Schmalleger & Marcum, 2019; Shoemaker, 2018).

From a consumer perspective, one could argue that people who consume ethically, sustainably, and from a moral stance are part of a subculture within the dominant consumer culture; they consume differently, in the minority, and against the norm. They are pushing back against consumerism (an ideology) and the tenets of a consumer society (especially materialism). People belonging to a subculture "use their membership as part of their self-identity" (Jones, 2018, para. 13). Consumers' ethics-based actions can be viewed as not meeting societal standards of how to consume like everyone else (normal) thereby making ethical consumer behaviour a consumer anomaly (i.e., inconsistent with behaviour in the larger scheme of things).

Differential Opportunity Theory

Finally, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) suggested that if juveniles and other offenders had more opportunities to succeed, they would be less likely to turn to a subculture for validation. They called this differential opportunity theory referring to when opportunities for access to legitimate means are different for different people (i.e., opportunities differentiate). If the way to legitimate means of success is blocked, people may turn to delinquent behaviour supported by a subculture. Instead of social factors thwarting their success, a lack of opportunities does. For example, they may have graduated from high school (education is a social factor) but could not find work (lacked opportunity). They would thus engage in the subculture's deviant behaviour (e.g., theft, selling drugs, prostitution) to avail themselves of opportunities to earn money (Shoemaker, 2018).

In a consumer society, avenues to legitimate purchase behaviour are often blocked; that is, most people either do not have access to fair trade and sustainably produced goods and services, cannot afford them, or both (Gruber & Schlegelmilch, 2014). They may *want* to consume sustainably with a moral conscience but cannot due to thwarted opportunities. But because people must shop, they have no recourse except to consume unsustainably. Their behaviour thus becomes delinquent because they lacked opportunities to spend otherwise thereby causing them to not fulfil their obligations to others, other species, and the planet. McGregor (2010) called this structural violence, wherein consumers "face a lack of opportunities due to no fault of their own" (p. 163). The marketplace is *structured* in such a way that it precludes ethical consumption, triggers moral disengagement, and favours delinquent consumer behaviour.

Degrees of Deviance Applied to People's Reactions to Judgements of Unethical and Immoral Consumption

Inspired by the collection of delinquency theories (see Table 1), and McGregor's (2008) use of neutralization theory to conceptualize immoral consumption, the commentary herein now shifts to address the range of reactions that people might have when their consumer behaviour is denounced as and judged delinquent and deviant. Henry and Eaton's (1999) degrees of deviance approach is used. They tendered six options that people can employ to deal with being judged and labelled a deviant or delinquent: rejection and counteraction, avoidance, acceptance and embracement, acceptance and self-denial, acceptance and self-transformation, and

becoming normal (see Table 2). Again, consumer examples are provided to illustrate the relevance of this approach to understand people's morally deficient consumer behaviour.

Table 2

Degrees of Deviance (Henry and Eaton, 1999)

Rejection and Counteraction – reject the label and the association and deny any culpability; go further and challenge what the label really means and what society thinks should be done if someone engages in this behaviour

Avoidance – reject the label and avoid the people judging and applying it; ignore the label and go about their business as usual, which can be aided by making excuses, creating diversions, and manufacturing social distance from accusers

Acceptance and Embracement – accept and embrace the label because they can rationalize the judgement and attendant label to be encouragement of and reward for the deviant behaviour

Acceptance and Self-denial – accept that the label is valid but argue there is nothing they can do to change things; feel very exposed and guilty, but don't know what to do about it

Acceptance and Self-transformation – accept that the label is valid and do everything they can to stop engaging in the deviant behaviour but do this in secret, so they are not exposed

Becoming Normal – recognize that it is normal for everyone to slip up once in awhile and choose to not engage in delinquent behaviour most of the time; any slippage is abnormal

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As a caveat, recent research on delinquent and deviant consumer behaviour has focused on illegal rather than immoral behaviour with examples of the former including shop lifting, misrepresenting a purchase, fraudulent returns, and lying about a purchase (Dootson et al., 2016, 2017). Illegal behaviour breaks the law, whilst immoral behaviour breaks social norms (Cohen & Vaccaro, 2006). Although consumers' so-called delinquent behavior *is* legal, its continual messaging as normal increases the risk of society accepting it as legitimate (i.e., the norm). The downside is thinking thus: 'Consumers are not breaking any laws; they are just contradicting societal values. – Where's the harm in that?' (Gruber & Schlegelmilch, 2014). To offset this eventuality, Henry and Eaton's (1999) degrees of deviance approach was applied to conceptualize how people might react to being judged and labeled delinquent in their consumer role (see Table 2).

Rejection and Counteraction

Henry and Eaton (1999) noted that, at its simplest, people can simply reject the label of a delinquent consumer, just outright reject the judgement and accusation, and retaliate by denying any culpability, liability, guilt, or responsibility. Through a range of options, they could (a) deny responsibility, injury, and a victim; (b) condemn the condemner, appeal to higher loyalties, or make the defense of necessity; (c) claim a ledger of past good behaviour, deny the necessity of a law, or claim entitlement; or (d) claim relative acceptability or individuality, as well as justify their behaviour by comparison or postponement (Dootson et al., 2016; McGregor, 2008).

As points of counteraction, they could also take steps to challenge (e) the meaning of such labels as normalcy, deviant, and delinquent and (f) what should be done about such behaviour. They may even (g) engage in political or social activity in an attempt to show other

consumers that their same behaviour is *not bad* and is, in effect, the normal stance that all people should be taking in the marketplace (Gruber & Schlegelmilch, 2014).

People may even go so far as to argue that their so-judged questionable consumer behaviour contributes to humanity and the human condition because it prevents greater harm caused by *other* forms of consumption and satisfies a *different* moral standard. 'People deserve what they get in life. Those who work for it, deserve it. We are doing them a favour. If we did not buy these things, they would not have a job.' This litany of neo-liberalism and Social Darwinism rhetoric would thus go unfettered in the marketplace (McGregor, 2010).

Avoidance

Some people may not readily accept the delinquent label, which accuses them of falling short in fulfilling their duty. Instead, they would actually believe that their behaviour is anything but delinquent. Consequently, they would avoid both the label and the person judging them. They would simply avoid accepting that this one aspect of their daily life, consumption, merits labeling them immoral or unethical. Shopping is not good or bad – it just is (McGregor, 2010). Interestingly, when people avoid something, they, in effect, do not address the essence underpinning the judgement informing the negative label. Instead, they simply ignore the label and go about business as usual – with a twist: they can make excuses, create diversions, manufacture social distance, or form alliances (Henry & Eaton, 1999). Each is briefly explained.

First, making excuses lets people self-acknowledge that their consumer behaviour was wrong but still enables them to deny any responsibility. They could excuse (justify) their behaviour by saying they were not in full control of themselves at the time or blame others for their actions (e.g., peers, marketers, advertisers, the media). The excuse strives to repair the broken social relations resulting from their activity by lessening the blame attached to their actions. Second, a diversion redirects attention to another issue or places the questionable action in a larger context. Consumers could argue there are few ethical options available to them. Third, consumers could avoid the source of their angst by distancing themselves from the person judging (labeling) them. Finally, they could form an alliance with others who are responsible for creating and perpetuating the formal system within which the delinquent action occurred (Henry & Eaton, 1999) (i.e., unite with fellow consumers).

Acceptance and Embracement

In some cases, consumers may accept, even willingly embrace, the label of a delinquent consumer and ironically make a concerted effort to engage in *even more* irresponsible consumption behaviour going so far as to form groups to this effect. They could welcome the label (Henry & Eaton, 1999). It is almost as if society's reaction to (judgement of) their excessive and unsustainable consumption validates and encourages further development of said behaviour. They could view the label of delinquent consumer as a reward for their efforts reasoning that they have been so engulfed in this type of consumption that it is about time someone finally noticed them. They could also strive to amplify their consumption activity, taking it to higher level – a sort of a backlash to the judgement and attendant label.

They would be aided in this action in a consumer society by the neoliberal market ideology. This holds that everyone is out for themselves, privatization is good, and decentralization of government services is necessary so that more consumer choice is available in the market. It assumes that if people cannot afford something, they do not deserve it. Individualism is necessary for the market to succeed; that is, consumers' goals and desires take precedence over societal, collective, ecological, and planetary interests. And, with its focus on

individual rights, there is no space for justice unless it entails holding everyone to the same standard so that no one gains a competitive advantage or special treatment (McGregor, 2010).

Acceptance and Self-denial

In an interesting twist, consumers who react with acceptance and self-denial actually accept the label of being irresponsible in their consuming actions *but* feel totally unable to do anything about this judgement or their situation (Henry & Eaton, 1999). They end up feeling isolated, alone, and rejected, feelings that are worsened because they still have to consume the same way. Once they are labeled, they feel exposed, like living in a fishbowl, and guilty that people know they are unconscientious, irresponsible consumers. No matter what anyone says to appease them, well-intended comments are inverted and seen as more rejection. The result is consumers with negative self-images. Ironically, in a consumer society, people tend to assuage low self-esteem with more spending thereby exacerbating the feelings of guilt held by those people who accept the label of being unethical but feel they can do nothing about it. A vicious cycle again ensues (McGregor, 2010).

Acceptance and Self-transformation

In this instance, not only do consumers accept the accusation that they have been irresponsible and unsustainable in their consumption role, they take it upon themselves to change – to transform. Actually, in this case, it is more likely that people will have self-identified as an unethical consumer but strived to change their behaviour in secret, so they do not give away their situation. They may even find like-minded people and form a self-help group to aid them in becoming normal (i.e., less deviant in the marketplace). Acknowledging that their unsustainable consumer actions may discredit them in society, they want to change things *before* more people notice their current unethical activity. To maintain a positive self-image during this transformational process, they may try to scaffold their old consumption habits with new, moral actions, such as volunteer work or altruism. The intent is to show those judging them that they *have* changed thereby thwarting ever being labeled in the first place (Henry & Eaton, 1999). They will have protected their honor and reputation as a responsible citizen.

Becoming Normal

Finally, for some people, the first step toward *becoming normal* is to understand what constitutes *normal* (Henry & Eaton, 1999). In the case of being a delinquent consumer in today's consumer society, normalcy means recognizing that everyone occasionally slips between (a) acceptable and expected marketplace behaviour and (b) deviant and delinquent marketplace behaviour. Normal is choosing to not be delinquent in their consumption behaviour *most of the time* and being *free to periodically choose* delinquency without serious consequences at other times (Dootson et al., 2016). Recall that delinquent means failing to consider what *ought* to be done.

Being normal also requires forging new relationships with those who live elsewhere, the next generation, other species, and nature. Seeing oneself 'in relationship' means assuming that one's consumer actions create a feedback loop implying that consequences cannot be escaped – what they put out there always comes back to them (McGregor, 2010). Being *normal* calls for people to (a) invest in consumer activities that respect the dignity, rights, freedom, and security of all citizens, species, nature, and earth; and (b) accept that people will slip from time to time with slippage being an abnormality (Henry & Eaton, 1999).

Discussion and Conclusion

Gruber and Schlegelmilch (2014) coined the phrase "unresolved paradox" to refer to situations where people say they value something (e.g., sustainability), but this value "only has a neglectable impact on their purchasing decisions" (p. 29). They warned that the failure of a consumer society to address this paradox, which is evident in the persistent "reinforcement of neutralizing patterns [,will contribute] to the rise of anomic consumer behavior" (p. 29) (i.e., lacking moral guidance).

The commentary herein strove to conceptualize how people might react to being judged as and labeled delinquent and deviant consumers. To that end, theories of delinquency (see Table 1) and Henry and Eaton's (1999) degrees of deviance approach (see Table 2) were employed to conceptualize this phenomenon. These two approaches proved useful for generating very plausible insights into people's possible reactions to this label. The illustrative examples for the delinquency theories and degrees of deviance were very easy to formulate and articulate. They are tenable postures that can withstand objection and skepticism. That said, future researchers are encouraged to operationalize the ideas contained herein to determine their empirical and theoretical relevance. Such scholarship would affirm whether the proposed conceptualizations serve to advance insights into people's possible reactions to their consumer behaviour being judged and labeled as delinquent and deviant.

More and more often, the literature reflects the assertion that "consumers justify or rationalize their deviant behaviours to evade self-blame and avoid uncomfortable feelings of guilt" (Harris & Daunt, 2011, p. 849). "Delinquent [consumers] learn a set of justifications or rationalizations [that] can insulate [them] from self-blame and the blame of others" (Chatzidakis et al., 2004, p. 529). They learn and internalize this behaviour after being observed and judged by others (Shah and Amjad, 2017). That said, scholars interested in exploring this aspect of consumption need to appreciate several caveats that will inform their research design protocols, hypotheses or research questions, and variable operationalization.

First, not all consumers value human rights, justice, child labour, working conditions, and environmental impact as legitimate consumer-choice criteria. Ethical consumers rate these as the most important choice criteria. Second, not everyone uses the same measure of moral intensity for consumer situations (i.e., degree of feeling about the consequences of a moral choice). Third, nor do people react the same way to being judged and labeled nonethical or immoral consumers intimating varied reactions to being judged and labeled delinquent or deviant as well (Auger et al., 2007; Dootson et al., 2016, 2017; Harris & Daunt, 2011; McGregor 2008; Shah & Amjad, 2017).

In conclusion, the delinquent and deviant aspect of consumption is part of marketplace morality, which is an aspect of the psychology of consumer behaviour (Campbell & Winterich, 2018). Claims of denial and attendant emotions tend to surface in day-to-day consumer mental processes and conversations (Gruber & Schlegelmilch, 2014). Although gaining importance, consumer behaviour framed as deviant and delinquent needs more study from different perspectives. Scholars are invited to further investigate the intellectual utility of these two theories for understanding this phenomenon by ensuring empirical verification and theoretical validation and evolution.

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