

The Relationship between Consumer's Ethical Consumption Consciousness, Life Meaning and Consumer Happiness

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Abstract

This study are to show the relation between ethical consumption consciousness, life meaning and happiness of life. Specifically, this study aims to examine the mediation effects of the meaning of life in the relationship of the ethical consumption consciousness and happiness, a survey was conducted by collecting 265 valid questionnaires. SPSS and AMOS statistical package were used to examine the relationships between variables.

The results showed that ethical consumption consciousness had a significantly positive effect on life meaning. It was also found that life meaning had a positive effect on happiness of life.

This study is significant in the sense that it identifies ethical consumerism consciousness has a positive influence on life meaning and consumer happiness. In particular, the mediating effect of the meaning of life, which is drawing attention in various research fields, was confirmed in the relationship between ethical consumption consciousness and happiness. This study can be used as effective information for further ethical consumption education and suggested implications for enhancing ethical consumption consciousness and happiness in various ways.

Keywords: *Ethical Consumption Consciousness, Life Meaning, Consumer Happiness*

1. Introduction

Ethical consciousness is becoming more and more important for consumers living in modern times, and the importance and spread of ethical consumption have been actively discussed in accordance with the trend of emphasizing the social responsibility of consumption. Ethical consumption is a consumption behavior that practices social responsibility according to the individual and moral beliefs of consumers. Social responsibility means economic responsibility, legal responsibility, sustainable consumption responsibility, and responsibility for contemporary humanity[1].

Research on ethical consumption continues to be of increasing interest and has been mainly focused on the concept of ethical consumption, characteristics of ethical consumption, ethical product purchase behavior, and ethical consumption education. According to Jeon[2] who interviewed consumers that practiced well-being consumption and ethical consumption, ethical consumers showed the following characteristics; pursuing a healthy lifestyle, satisfied with their lives, putting emphasis on relationships, not caring about the product price, ethical awareness and behavior level, interests in social and environmental issues, perception of consumer effectiveness, trust, emphasizing on values and causes, forming a bond of sympathy, and feeling guilt for not purchasing ethical products. After Oh[3] set up a model that reflected positive anticipated emotions instead of

perceived behavioral control based on the theory of planned behavior, he found out that ethical obligations, self-identity, and altruism affected the attitudes on ethical consumption and the attitudes on ethical consumption, ethical obligations, altruism, and positive anticipated emotions on ethical consumption influenced the intentions of ethical consumption. It turned out that ethical obligations, social consciousness, and experience from ethical consumption influenced consumer's ethical consumption behaviors. As a result of the research on ethical consumption among college students, it was shown that the level of ethical consumption behavior among college students was moderate and social psychological variables such as social responsibility, low materialist values, etc. were found to be highly influential factors to their behaviors.

Also, there is a lack of research on the psychological consequences after the purchase. Although the fundamental goal of 'pursuing happiness' is inherent in the basis of consumption, today's consumption, defined as a consumer society, is not only an important element that gives meaning to life and brings happiness but also the cause of anxiety and misery due to the essential characteristic of consumption desire that can never be satisfied. Consumption desire can be understood as a desire for 'difference' and a desire for symbols and signs to reveal differences from others. Consumption can be seen as a means to satisfy the desire for such symbols.

Life meaning is a contributing factor to the well-being of human's entire life in the events of their daily lives and important life changing events. Recent positive psychology shows that the meaning of life contributes to reducing negative emotions such as depression, anxiety and obsessive compulsion associated with strong negative experiences, and factors related to quality of life or objects of happiness have also been studied.

The meaning of life is literally related to the word 'purpose and significance', which is an important developmental theme for college students who are about to become emerging adults[4]. In particular, it can be said that the meaning of life is a significant theme for college students as they suffered from the competition of college admission and are suffering from unemployment.

The meaning of life is divided into two categories; a search for meaning and a presence of meaning. It is said that a presence of meaning is a subjective perception in which people find their lives meaningful and has a positive relation with positive psychological indicators such as life satisfaction and self-esteem. Jeong and Lee[5] classified a search for meaning as a desire and motivation to find meaning and a presence of meaning as a subjective feeling that something has meaning. A search for meaning in life is a universal and fundamental motivation to explore what makes ones' life meaningful, which is a natural and healthy aspect of life, to pursue new opportunities and challenges, to understand their experience and to satisfy the desires they want to achieve. In the studies of Yoo and Kim[6], it was shown that a search for meaning had a positive effect on the well-being of life. Jeong and Lee[5] suggested that when a search for meaning mediated a presence of meaning, psychological well-being increased, which meant if the motivation for a search for meaning failed, it might have a negative effect on the well-being of life. Jung[7] suggested that a search for meaning did not affect psychological well-being and happiness.

Although the higher the level of consumption activity, the higher the happiness derived from consumption, the level of consumption activity did not directly lead to the happiness in life. Consumption activities had the effect of increasing the satisfaction of life and positive emotions, which composed the happiness of life, but also had no direct impact on the happiness of life due to the increased negative emotions at the same time. Therefore, measuring the happiness of consumers after ethical consumption is a very important task. Even though ethical consumption is a new trend emerging as an alternative consumption in the modern society, it only applied the concept of ethics to consumption, which means its genuine property is 'consumption'.

In addition, previous studies related to the meaning of life and happiness have mainly discussed the positive relationship between the two variables, but studies on whether the meaning of life positively affects the happiness of life by these mechanisms are somewhat rare. In particular, college students who are about to emerge into adulthood may have a lot of questions about the meaning of life. The purpose of this study is to analyze the structural relationships among these variables and what can influence the process of gaining happiness in life for college students who are wondering about the meaning of life.

The concept of happiness in various fields has been described as 'quality of life' or 'subjective well-being' and also happiness is used in the quality as a concept such as 'subjective of life' or 'subjective well-being'[8]. Happiness is a subjective feeling that enhances the quality of life. Sung and others[8] defined the consumption happiness as a level of happiness experienced by consumers at the moment they actually consume. Focusing

on the values and benefits consumers pursue when they consume, they classified the consumption types and then compared them based on the level of consumption value such as types of benefits, consumption directivity, and timing of benefits.

The definition of happiness is very diverse, which leads to the question of how to measure happiness. Looking at how to measure consumer happiness, it is divided into two opinions. One is that measuring consumer happiness is the same as the method of measuring general happiness as it is composed of one-dimensional concepts and the other is that it is composed of multidimensional concepts. The former can be measured with a single item such as 'How happy do you generally feel?'.

Based on existing studies, this study aims to identify how ethical consumption is connected with meaning and happiness of life when it comes to the psychological structure among college students. In particular, the mediating effect of the meaning of life, which is drawing attention in various research fields, was confirmed in the relationship between ethical consumption consciousness and happiness.

2. Research Method

2.1 Research model

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis about the effect of ethical consumption consciousness on life meaning(H1) and happiness(H2). In addition, a research model was to verify the mediating effect of life meaning between consumption consciousness and consumer happiness(H3). In other words, the research model is a shown in Figure 1.

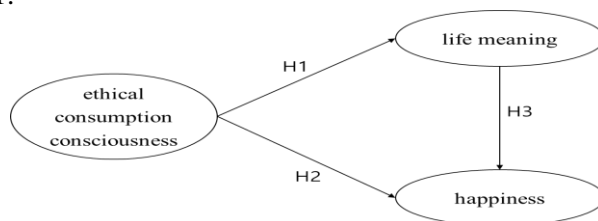


Figure 1. Research model

2.2 Research Measurement

Based on previous research, this study classified ethical consumption consciousness into three categories: eco-friendly, internet copyright, and boycott. And the meaning of life was divided into two categories: search for meaning and presence of meaning. Consumer happiness is defined as the happiness that emerges in the consumption realm, among the overall well-being in life([9] [10]).

Respondents use a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* to rate the scale's five items.

2.3 Analysis method and sample characteristics

A structural equation model was used to verify the hypothesis. After the structural model analysis was performed using partial least square (PLS), factor analysis was performed to confirm the validity of the measured values, and the Cronbach alpha value was used for reliability analysis. AMOS was used to analyze the research model. To test our model, Amos was used for assessing both, the measurement instrument and the structural model.

A survey was conducted by collecting 265 valid questionnaires. The demographic characteristics of this study were as follows. Among the college students who participated in the survey, 145 (54.7%) male students and 120 (45.3%) female students responded. Grades were 1st grade 53(20.0%), 2nd grade 121(45.3%), 3rd grade 70(26.4%), and 4th grade 22(8.3%). Ager were 53(20.0%) under the age 20, 141(53.2%) in 21 to 23, and 71(26.8%) over the age of 24. The respondents were mostly sophomores, with those aged 21 to 23.

3. Result

3.1 Construct validity and reliability

There is only one potential characteristic or concept in one set composed of multiple items, and this is called unidimensionality. Ethical consumption consciousness, meaning of life and consumer happiness verified the validity of measurement concepts for structural equation models based on the construct identified through the unidimensionality of individual variables. In addition, the two-step approach of Anderson and Gerbing[11] was used in this study. Ethical consumption consciousness and meaning of life were composed of one potential factor by conducting a second-order confirmatory factor analysis as a higher-order factor construct.

In order to verify concentration validity and reliability, factor load and average variance extraction (AVE) were used. Reliability was secured because the Cronbach's alpha value of all research concepts exceeded the standard value of 0.7. The factor load values also exceeded 0.5, and a certain degree of validity was also secured (see <Table 1>).

For discriminant validity, we investigated whether the square root of AVE is greater than the correlation of scale. All the results met the criteria. Moreover, all CRs (construct reliability) exceeded 0.80, indicating a value greater than the standard value of 0.7, thus ensuring discriminant validity. And it can be seen that the AVE for all research concepts is more than 0.6. As a result of the analysis, the feasibility and reliability were confirmed, and discriminant validity was also confirmed (see <table 1>).

Table 1. Construct validity and reliability

Variable		Cronbach's α	Eigen value	AVE	CRs
Ethical consumption consciousness	Eco-friendly	.880	4.22	.672	.859
	Internet copyright	.715	1.26	.625	.829
	boycott	.756	1.06	.602	.819
Meaning of life	Search for meaning	.856	1.10	.659	.852
	Presence of meaning	.891	3.70	.678	.863
Consumer happiness		.866	2.86	.670	.904

3.2 Results of structural model

As a result of analyzing the structural equation model for hypothesis testing, the fit index of the model is $\chi^2=62.618$, $df=24$, $p=.000$, $GFI=.948$, $AGFI=.903$, $NFI=.936$, $CFI=.959$, $RMR=.063$, $RMSEA=.078$ and generally found to meet the criteria.

Looking at the specific analysis results, it was found that ethical consumption consciousness had a positive effect on the meaning of life ($\gamma=.440$, $p=.000$) and consumer happiness ($\beta=.272$, $p=.014$). In addition, the meaning of life was found to have a statistically significant effect on the happiness of consumers ($\beta=.389$, $p=.001$). In particular, it was found that ethical consumption consciousness had the greatest influence on the meaning of life (see <table 2>).

As a result of the analysis through the structural equation model, it was analyzed that the ethical consumption consciousness had a mediating effect of meaning of life in the relationship of consumer happiness. Based on this, specific mediated effects were verified based on the structural equation model of ethical consumption awareness, meaning of life, and happiness.

Based on these results, the Z-test of Sobel[12] was used to verify the statistical significance of the effects. The Sobel test is basically a specialized t test that provides a method to determine whether the reduction in the effect of the independent variable, after including the mediator in the model, is a significant reduction and therefore whether the mediation effect is statistically significant. In order to determine the statistical significance of the indirect effect, a statistic based on the indirect effect must be compared to its null sampling

distribution. The Sobel test uses the magnitude of the indirect effect compared to its estimated standard error of measurement to derive a t statistic. This t statistic can then be compared to the normal distribution to determine its significance. As a result of the Sobel's test, the statistic was $z=2.898(p=.004)$, and the significance of the mediated effect model was recognized.

Table 2. Analysis results

			estimate	St. est.	S.E.	t	p
Ethical consumption consciousness	□	Meaning of life	.440	.430	.087	5.081	.000
Meaning of life	□	Consumer happiness	.389	.297	.121	3.201	.001
Ethical consumption consciousness	□	Consumer happiness	.272	.203	.110	2.465	.014

Fit index of model : $\chi^2=62.618$, $df=24$, $p=.000$, $GFI=.948$, $AGFI=.903$, $NFI=.936$, $CFI=.959$, $RMR=.063$, $RMSEA=.078$

4. Conclusion

We live in pursuit of meaning in various events of life, as human beings seeking meaning. College students preparing to get out of adolescence, as adults of one person, to enter society experience many changes in life physically, emotionally and socially. This study was meaningful in identifying the factors that influence these relationships in the process of making college students who have many questions about the meaning of life feel the meaning and happiness of life. In particular, it is significant in that it grasped the meaning of ethical consumption, not mere 'consumption' of the meaning of life for college students. Understanding the structural relationship between ethical consumption, meaning of life and feelings of happiness can also be seen as differentiating factors for the thesis.

This study is to investigate the effects of ethical consumption consciousness of college students on the meaning of life and consumer happiness. In particular, the mediating effect of the meaning of life, which is drawing attention in various research fields, was confirmed in the relationship between ethical consumption consciousness and happiness. The findings and conclusions from this study are as follows. Firstly, consumers who practice more ethical consumption have higher scores of the meaning of life. Second, it was confirmed that the higher the meaning of life, the higher the consumer happiness. Third, consumers who practice more ethical consumption have higher scores of consumer happiness. This means that the more consumers perceive their values and beliefs, the higher the meaning of life becomes. And this means that there is a difference in the level of happiness consumers feel according to their values and beliefs. Nevertheless, the result of this study suggests that consumers can achieve a high level of consumer happiness if they continue to practice ethical consumption according to their beliefs.

As described above, the results of this study recognized the importance of ethical consumption consciousness to increase the meaning of life, and reaffirmed the importance of the meaning of life to increase the happiness of consumers. In addition, the research results are expected to contribute to raising consumers' positive perception of ethical consumption in the long term.

This study provides useful information on causes and reactions to enhance the meaning of life, but has the following limitations. First, the subjects of investigation of this study were extracted from university students in certain areas for the convenience of investigation. Second, this study considered only three levels of ethical consumption: eco-friendly, internet copyright, and boycott. Future research will require analysis using various variables for ethical awareness.

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