Business Ethics: Optional or Essential for Business? - A Case Study into the Retail Industry From a Consumer Perspective.

Georgina Harle
Andy Phippen
Plymouth Business School, University of Plymouth, UK.

Abstract
The purpose of the research was to understand the relationship between business compliance and ethics, and the effects of ethical and unethical behaviour can cause, from a consumer perspective. The research discusses individuals in relation to ethical theory, ethical decision-making, as well as influences that may hinder ethics as a consideration.

The methodology employed was qualitative in nature through the use of individual, in-depth, face-to-face interviews. However, the use of a quantitative coding method was used in order to analysis the findings.

The results both complemented and contradicted literature. Conclusions found that the effect of unethical behaviour on consumers was limited due to a variety of factors, with brand reputation, media, and lack of awareness all acting as major considerations into influencing consumer’s decisions. A theory regarding the problem of different perspectives within individuals was also apparent, thus developing conclusions that contributed to the theory of a ‘grey area’ within ethics. Results also uncovered potential theories loosely related to this research project, which would form as interesting suggestions for future research.

Keywords
Business, Ethics, Perspectives, Decision-Making, Influences

Introduction
With the public recently being exposed to an array of corporate scandals, there appears to be a rise in interest in the debate around ethical business practice, (Armitage, 2014). Campell and Kitson (2008) support this idea as they acknowledge a significant growth in the interest of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) during the past decade. Companies appear to be following this trend, for instance John Lewis (2015), Marks and Spencer (2015), and L’Oreal (2015), who have all been actively creating awareness to their consumers of their ethical business practices. While others who have had their unethical practices being uncovered to the public, such as Tesco (Neate and Moulds, 2013), Starbucks (Campbell, 2012) and Shell (Klein, 2000) have experienced a decrease in sales percentages due to their lack of commitment to the subject, to the extent of illegal practice. Alternatively, literature does conflict this argument with the acknowledgement that the aim of business is generally 'to create wealth and employment’, as stated by Friedman, (1970), and not to promote ethical awareness. Further analysis of ethics explores the ideas around ethical and unethical decision-making, providing theory including justifications as to why businesses act in such ways.

These conflicting perspectives and influences have formed both an interesting and important topic area, causing the following question to be the focus of this research project; Business Ethics: Optional or Essential for Business?
To gain a greater understanding of the topic, literature first focuses on the concept of ethics, understanding what this actually means in both business and society today, and recognising the complexity of the term. The latter part of the literature focuses on the decision-making process in regards to both ethical and unethical decision-making within business, as well as the potential influences into these theories. The initial research forms an important base in defining and shaping the research question.

In addition to secondary research explored within the literature, a methodology is discussed to justify how the technique of face-to-face individual interviews was acquired to form crucial primary data. The discussion and results that is then examined clarifies the importance of this primary research in drawing accurate conclusions. The combination of both primary and secondary data allowed for the reviewed literature to be challenged within analysis, forming interesting debates and conclusions around the subject of Business Ethics.

**Literature Review**

*Crane and Matten (2007, p. 8)* define that ethics is, ‘concerned with the study of morality and the application of reason to elucidate specific rules and principles that determine right and wrong for a given situation’, stating that it is these rules and principles that form ethical theories. Closely linked to ethics *Fernando (2010)* defines morality as ‘human conduct and values’. *Crane and Matten (2007)* explain this relationship, suggesting that morality heads ethics, which eventually leads to producing ethical theories.

**Ethical Theory**

*De George, (1999)* states two opposing ethical theories. He argues traditional ethical theory tends to be based around the idea of ‘ethical absolutism’, which suggests morals are universally applicable, and therefore ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ can be rationally determined. While a more contemporary approach entails the theory of ‘ethical relativism’, whereby morality is dependant upon the individual and their culture, therefore there can be no universal ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

*Crane and Matten (2007)* argue that traditional theories tend to fall into two categories, consequentialist, and non-consequentialist. They state that non-consequentialist ethics is concerned with the motivation or principle leading to the action, while consequentialist ethics considers the outcome from the action.

Consequentialist ethics consists of ethical theories including ‘egoism’ and ‘utilitarianism’. Egoism is the belief that something is morally right if it is in pursuit of an individuals long, or short desires, (*Crane and Matten, 2007*). *Smith (1793)* states that egoism is based around the notion of individual self-interest being acceptable as it produces desirable outcomes for society. *Bentham (1776)* defines moral actions through utilitarianism as the greatest happiness, to the greatest number of individuals. Thus this outcome would act as a measure of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, and focuses on principles of collective welfare, rather than that of the individual, (*Crane and Matten, 2007*).

Non-consequentialist ethics entails the idea of rights and justice. Rights is a deontological approach, that focuses on ideas including what is right for one is right for all (*Kant, 1785*). The deontological approach considers ethics within the process of decision-making, and not the results, (*Cavanaugh et al, 1981*). Justice also known as rawlsianism, is based on the theory that individuals have equal access to basic rights, so that even the least advantaged individuals still gain the greatest possible benefit from economic inequalities, (*Crane and Matten, 2007*).

Kaler (1999) recognises the importance in understanding this range of perspectives in order to establish solutions to ethical problems. With these theories shaping our understanding of ethics, the topic in relation to business will now be discussed.
Business Ethics

Business Ethics is defined by Crane and Matten (2010, p.5) as the, ‘study of business situations, activities, and decisions where issues of right and wrong are addressed’. Campell and Kitson (2008) state there has been significant growth in the interest of CSR during the past 10 years, with an emergence of indices for measuring the subject. It is not uncommon now for multinationals to advertise their commitment to business ethics online.

The GoodCorporation established by the Institute of Business Ethics identifies an ethical standard for organisations to follow, as it is their belief that CSR is at the heart of good business practice. GoodCorporation state ethical business practice should entail:

- Fair treatment of employees, customers, suppliers, the community,
- Protection of the environment and being fair to shareholders or,
- Suppliers of finance.

Despite the informal laws established by The GoodCorporation, Buhmann (2006) argues that there are some minimum regulations which constraints companies to comply within legal frameworks. This utilitarianism approach would therefore suggest ethical business practice to be essential, as the government aims to stimulate practice beyond basic standards by encouraging companies to adopt business ethics.

However, some researchers have stated that it is not the responsibility of business to act ethically. Friedman, (1970) acknowledges that a company’s main aim is generally to create wealth and employment. Schumpeter (2012) also sheds light to this argument as he admits CSR has earned a reputation for ‘flakiness’ within business.

Karnani (2010, p.69) argues that a company can ‘do well by doing good’, thus providing theory that ethics is essential in achieving business success. This relates to the theory stated by Falck and Heblich (2007) that, not only doing good is the right thing to do, but it can also lead to doing better.

The idea of ethics and profits is closely linked here as Jo and Harjoto (2011, p.53) argue, ‘CSR engagement with community environment, diversity, and employees plays a significant role in enhancing Corporate Financial Performance’. Furthermore, McMillian and Hyde (2000) debate that organisations ‘act’ in ways that characterise them. John Lewis is a convincing example of this as with their strong ethical practice, they reported a staff bonus profit rise of 17 per cent in March 2014, (BBC News, 2014).

Research by Heslin and Ochoa (2008) also concluded successful ethical practice on an internal level is likely to motivate employees and thus increase overall productivity. Crane and Matter (2010) further highlight the advantages, stating good ethical practice through fair treatment of employees can increase commitment, and attract potential employees. As such, the discussed literature provides reasons for the importance of ethical business practice.

Philosopher John Stuart Mill argued for the development of a positive view of the universe, stating that it should contribute to human well-being. This suggests there is no doubt that business practice would be ethical for the greater good of society, whether it was essential or not, (Zalta, 2002). However, Friedman (1970) highlights the ethical theory of egoism as he argues the ‘social responsibility of business is to increase profits, without too much regulation’, therefore, why should business see ethics as essential within their practice?

Further research to see companies not acknowledging ethics as a major focus can be identified through recent media coverage highlighting a range of companies acting in an unethical way. For instance, Primark, who despite publically stating they will pay a ‘living wage’ overseas, it has been found that the company are paying workers roughly £13.97 a month, (Collins, 2008). Retailer Apple has also been accused of unethical practice through reported child labour within their supply chain, (Garside, 2013). This also connotes the theory of ethical relativism, as although the company may be acting ethically within the UK, it is not on a global scale, potentially due to a difference in ethical culture. Furthermore, recent tax avoidance schemes see multinationals...
such as Starbucks being accused of unethical practice as Sikka (2010) argues the firms tax avoidance strategy benefited its shareholders at the expense of society, given that taxes are partly used for social programmes, (Huseynov, Klamm, 2012). Google and Amazon have also been under scrutiny regarding this topic. Egosim is present here as their actions were undoubtedly in pursuit of the shareholders long and short term desires.

However, with Patton (2014) announcing that Starbucks beat estimated profits despite the tax row, and Apple being reported to have made the biggest quarterly profit ever by a public company, (BBC News, 2015), it would suggest that Friedman (1970) theory stating that the lead responsibility of business is to make profits from its resources, is a realistic analysis of business practice.

Gellerman (1986) identifies the rationalisation for companies acting unethically, including the belief that:
- The activity is within reasonable legal and ethical limits and is not really illegal or immoral,
- The activity is in the corporations or individuals best interest and completing the activity is expected,
- The activity will never be discovered or publicised, therefore it is ‘safe’,
- The activity helps the organisation; therefore the organisation will disregard it and protect those engaging in the activity.

Tesco, Aldi and the Co-operative are arguably examples of this theory as they were found to have included horsemeat within their produce during 2013, most likely in a bid of saving costs, and under the pretention that they wouldn’t be found out as argued by Gellerman (1986). Deontological theory is also applicable here as the business decision has not considered the results of their actions. Dunkelberg and Jessup (2001) also argue rational for why businesses act unethically. They believe it is caused by uncontrollable addictive behaviour, triggered by the need for control, money and power.

The confliction between literature surrounding ethical and unethical business practice provides interesting debate. However research here does appear to concentrate from a business perspective. The focus of this report will now move onto how these ethical decisions are made.

**Ethical Decision-making**

As discussed, businesses do have to comply with legal frameworks; therefore Crane and Matten (2007) state that business ethics is concerned with issues that are not covered by this, including issues that are not definitely perceived as wrong by the law. Crane and Matten (2007) recognise that these issues may lead to legislation, but until then there is minimal compliance for business ethics, that is not covered by law. As such, Trevino and Nelson (2007, p.3) acknowledge business ethics ‘values are in conflict’, and thus often fall into a ‘grey area’ between ethics, and law.

Examples of business practice that falls into this grey area include the Starbucks tax avoidance scheme. Business practice regarding animal testing of products, executive pay, persuasive selling techniques and child labour are also other areas of ambiguity, thus fall under the grey area between ethics and law, (Crane and Matten, 2007).

Retailer Primark has also been witnessed to fall into the grey area. In 2013 one their suppliers factories in Bangladesh collapsed killing nearly 300 people, due to a lack in health in safety regulations, (Moore 2013). Workers conditions have also been under scrutiny for being unethical as Hoskins (2014) reported long hours and overtime, to the extent of consumers finding ‘cry’s for help ‘sewn in labels of the garments. Dependant upon ones perspective, this business practice connotes unethical behaviour. However Primark haven’t been acting illegally. After all they are renounced for providing ‘low cost fashion’ that the consumer is

(Smithers, 2008). As such, these practices form an example of the grey area between ethics and law. This idea of a grey area leads business ethics to become equivocal, as there is not a simple ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer, (Crane and Matten, 2007).

With the ‘grey area’, it poses the question of what actually is an ethical decision? Morris (2004) argues that by recognising ‘wrong’, or ‘right’, individuals have already identified a moral situation. As such, before this
identification process, the individual is to examine situations, taking account of numerous factors. Morris (2004) highlights the most important of these factors:

- The decision is likely to have significant effects on others,
- The decision is likely to be characterised by choice, in that alternative courses of action are open,
- The decision is perceived as ethically relevant by one or more parties.

With this in mind, it suggests that individuals go through some form of ethical decision-making process.

Rest (1986) believes individuals go through a four-stage process to decide if an action is ethical. Firstly, this entails recognising a moral issue, before making a moral judgement, to establish moral intent and thereafter engage in moral behaviour, (Crane and Matten, 2007; Rest 1986). However, research supported by Jones (1991), Leo, Ferrell and Mansfield (2000, p. 186), acknowledges that sometimes not each stage is met, as individuals will choose to make immoral decisions anyway due to a variety of other factors.

Closely linked to the topic, Jobber and Fahy (2009) identify a theory of five stages that a consumer typically goes through when making a purchase. The theory suggests that consumers go through a rational process, (Mowen, 1988). Instead they suggest individuals will firstly recognise a problem or need, and it is through this awareness that they will research the problem or need, before making an evaluation of the researched solutions. From this, Jobber and Fahy (2009) state a purchase is made, with a post-purchase evaluation of their decision taking place afterwards. Both theories recognise that individuals go through a specific process within their decision-making.

Analysis of concepts suggested by both Rest (1986) and Jobber and Fahy (2009) has led to the identification of an adapted theory. Through combing both these theories, one could suggest that Rests (1986) concept of the ethical decision making process, could sit within the same stage as Jobber and Fahys (2009) ‘information search/ evaluation of alternatives’. However, ethical theory can also be applied to the ‘Purchase’ and ‘Post-Purchase evaluation of decision’, as Burnett and Lunsford, (1994) identifies the idea of guilt associated with ethical decision-making. This idea will later be discussed.

**Individual Influences on Ethical Decision-making**

Unsurprisingly there is an idea that consumers tend to hold positive attitudes towards ethical companies, and the contrary to unethical businesses. However, Folkes and Kamins, (1999) argue this information may be combined in complex ways.

Research by Burnett and Lunsford, (1994) identifies the theory of guilt which can be applicable to individuals ethical decision-making. The theory suggests that a consumer will experience a negative emotion, should they partake in something they feel is unethical, thus suggesting an impact on consumer behaviour. Conclusions of the study argue individuals will feel one of two types of consumer guilt; anticipatory guilt, experienced before the consideration of a purchase that conflicts with ones values and norms; the other includes moral and social guilt, experienced when having made an unethical purchase.

However, Cavanaugh et al (1981) highlights that an individual’s perception of ethics can be highly problematic. Crane and Matten (2007, p.136) state ‘Individual influences on ethical decision-making relate to those facets of the individual who is actually going through the decision-making process’. They also state that individual factors can explain why some people perceive particular actions to be unethical whilst others don’t. However, these influences outlined can be debated, as results from multiple research has at times been contradictory, (Loe et al. 2000; O’Fallon and Butterfield 2005).

Ruegger and King (1992) concluded that age and gender did contribute to ethical perception. Further research by Reiis and Mitra (1998) also found that factors including locus of control, education, gender, and work experience all impacted upon their ethical perception. Also linked with influences into ethical perception,
McCombs (1997) argues that the media play a strong role as they tell us what to think about, and perhaps even what to do about it, (Fortunato, 2005).

Therefore, with reference to literature, it suggests a consumer’s perspective of ethical business practice is varied due to numerous factors. Even so, when consumers have decided that behaviour is ethical or unethical, will it impact upon their opinion of business and behaviour linked to the decision-making process?

**Summary of Business Ethics Literature**

In summary, current literature supports in understanding ethical theory, to the extent of identifying what ethics actually means as defined by Crane and Matten, (2007). As such, ethical theories form ideas more broadly known as ‘consequentialist’ and ‘non-consequentialist’ ethics, in which individuals can be categorised. The ethical theories are significant as they can give ideas as to how individuals, and businesses act. This also helps in understanding theories that suggest why businesses act in the way they do. For instance, as Karnani (2010), and Falck and Heblich (2007), identify arguments to suggest the benefits of ethics within business, stating the case that ethical business practice can enhance a company performance. However, examples highlighted do conflict with this research, giving light to theories discussed by Gellerman (1986) and Friedman (1970) who identify reasons for organisations acting unethically, acknowledging the overall aim of business to enhance shareholder wealth, and not be promoting ethics.

Literature forwarded by Rest (1986), and Jobber and Fahy (2009) help in understanding the decision-process individuals supposedly go through, which can be applied to ethics. However, further research uncovered literature to suggest these processes are affected or limited by a variety of factors, thus influences into ones perspective also appear to play a key role within ethics and decision-making. Conclusions by Crane and Matten (2007) highlight that ethical behaviours are dependent upon factors of the partaking individual, although there does appear to be inconsistency between literature, thus an accurate conclusion as to whether specific factors affect ethical perception cannot be made, finding light in the point made by Cavanaugh et al (1981) that perception of ethics can be highly problematic. This theory links closely with the idea of a ‘grey area’, which represents the controversial topics that may not be illegal, or strike one as unethical, and thus are debatable topics dependant upon ones perception.

Evidently, there is some literature regarding the idea of whether ethics should or not be applied within business. Literature also forms ideas on decision-making processes and perceptions of ethics. However, literature that does not directly confront the consumer perspective of whether ethical practice is optional or essential in business, thus identifying the need for further research to be conducted within this area.

**Influence on Research Question**

The literature discussed has provided reason for the need to refine the proposed research question. Previous study including Friedman’s (1970) and Gellerman (1986) theory, has seen research focusing on an internal ethical stance, rather than that of the consumer. As such, the study will be constricted to this unidentified focus. Additionally, as literature regarding ethical decision-making, including Crane and Mattens (2007), influencing factors, has made clear, the perspective in question will require individuals from a definite criterion of factors. Similarly, it is also important to narrow the focus of ethics to an industry that these individuals can relate to, thus with the cases acknowledged within this report, the focus of study will be narrowed to ethical perspectives from a consumer in regards to the retail industry.

Therefore, as previous studies have been difficult to build conclusions on due to the internal stance they hold, any difference in conclusion can be isolated as being due to consumer perspective. The ambiguity due to the demographics of previous research will also be abolished, as the study will focus on a specific criterion, thus the research question becomes;

*Business Ethics: Optional or essential for business? – A case study into the retail environment, from a consumer perspective, of specific criterion; has partaken in higher education, is of adult age, and in the South of England.*
Specific Aim
The study will address the issues surrounding business ethics with the following aim:

- To understand the relationship between businesses compliance to ethical practice, and the effects it has from a consumer’s perspective.

Objectives
As a result of the above aim, the objectives for the project have been identified as:

- Review literature on business ethics, looking particularly at the motivations to engage in ethical or unethical business practice.
- Conduct research with consumers, to discover their perceptions on ethical practice and whether it makes a difference to their purchasing decisions within the retail industry.
- Analyse research to identify any factors that have the ability to increase or inhibit the consumer perspective of ethical or unethical business practice within the retail industry.

Research Methodology
The methodology employed was qualitative, with the use of interviews. Saunders (2012, p. 372), define a research interview as a ‘purposeful conversation between two or more people’, in which an interviewer will ask ‘concise and unambiguous questions’, while the interviewee willingly responds and listens. To avoid inconsistency the focus of interviews was constricted to the form of individual, face-to-face interviews. Interviewees were required to meet a specific criteria; had partaken in higher education, (with A Levels or equivalent being the lowest form of education); be of adult age; living within the South of England. As such, a non-probability (non-random) sample technique was adopted, (Saunders, 2012). The sample size was determined through theoretical saturation. Consequently twenty interviews were completed. The arrangement of the interview was semi-structured due to the need of gaining in-depth research in order to meet the specific aim and objectives, (Cooper and Schindler, 2008).

Justification of Qualitative Interview Method
Collection of the data needed could arguably have been achieved via a focus group. The term refers to group interview that focuses on a particular issue, product or topic by encouraging discussion amongst participants and the sharing of perceptions in an open environment, (Krueger and Casey 2009). However, the method of interviews was chosen in attempt to achieve more accurate data, as research by Sussman et al (1991) found focus groups can lead to a “polarization” effect, whereby individuals will exaggerate their opinions, or even withhold experiences depending on the social context, (Hollander, 2004; Insberg, 1986). Instead individuals will follow the general opinion, leading to the issue of groupthink, (Park, 1990; Choi and Kim, 1999).

Therefore, due to the objective of identifying a variety of factors that affect a consumer’s perception of business ethics, an interview where others did not influence individuals appeared more appropriate, (McGivern, 2006).

Additionally, Pavlish and Pharris, (2012) argue that sensitive topics should be avoided in focus groups, stating that in-depth interviews would be more appropriate, particularly when involving subjects relating to guilt, (Burnett and Lunsford, 1994). Consequently, emphasising the justification for interviews, as ethical perceptions are considered to be a sensitive topic.

Furthermore, Hague, Hague, and Morgan (2004), recognise the ease to obtain more in-depth explanations, greater accuracy, and legitimacy through face-to-face interviews. Thus leading to higher levels of understanding, as any misunderstandings regarding questions can be cleared up easily, (Dantzker and Hunter, 2000).

Interview Structure
Saunders (2012) identifies three traditional methods of interview structure; structured, unstructured, and semi-structured. A structured interview involves a pre-planned set of questions, whereby the interviewer does not
deviate to relating topics, each structured interview is therefore the same, *(Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2010)*. Benefits of this method suggest the research to have a more targeted approach, having the ability to answer a specific aim and objectives, *(McGivern, 2006)*. *Bryman (1988)* defines an unstructured interview as a method where the researcher provides minimal guidance and allows considerable latitude for interviewees. A key advantage is that the researcher is in a position to probe the interviewee for a greater depth of response, *(Klenke, 2008)*. Semi-structured interviews do entail predetermined questions, however this method allows a conversational manner to unfold, giving the chance for greater issues within the topic to be explored, *(Clifford, French and Valentine, 2010)*. The combination of both unstructured, and structured benefits outlined by McGivern, *(2006)* and Klenke, *(2008)*, and with the desired objectives in mind, the interview structure chosen was semi-structured.

Within the semi-structured interview, case scenarios, and products were utilised. This entailed putting the interviewee into a realistic situation, and asking questions before hinting at the topic of ethics. Therefore, the interviewee was not aware of the ethical nature of the research that may have resulted in bias, *(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007)*. The interview structure is illustrated in Appendix A.

**Case scenarios**

In order to achieve more accurate results, questions aimed to put the interviewee in a realistic situation. *King (2010)* states the use of case scenarios is particularly effective during qualitative interviews. Therefore, the method was utilised to increase the reality of the purchase situation, a conclusion that came from a study by *Carrigan and Atalla (2001)*. Scenario 1 was based on an ethical dilemma adapted from *Crane and Matten (2007)*. It focused on the idea of a particularly successful employee. However it was noticed that the employee would at times use techniques including lying to make a sale. Scenario 2 questioned purchases brought from a business that had engaged in tax avoidance. Lastly, Scenario 3 put the interviewee in the situation of unethical working conditions that were considered common abroad. The interviewee was then asked questions regarding the scenarios, with the aim of discovering how consumers fit with ethical theory, and their opinions of what is, and isn’t ethical behaviour. This complimented the aim of research to understand the relationship between businesses compliance to ethical practice, and the effects it has from a consumer’s perspective.

**Case selection of products**

A selection of products was also used within the interview. Interviewees were asked to choose a product that they would purchase. Their decision-making was then questioned to meet the objective of discovering the key influences affecting this decision, and whether ethics came into consideration. Due to factors within the discussed decision-making theories by *Rest (1986)*, and *Jobber and Fahy (2009)*, the product chosen had to fit these criteria. This included the need to make the purchase realistic, a factor identified as key to ensure consumers provide accurate results as stated by *Carrigan and Atalla, 2001*. The product also needed to be appropriate to the interviewee sample, including being applicable to both males and females. As such digital tablets were chosen. Within the selection of three products available to the consumer, two were produced by reportedly unethical businesses, *(Apple ‘iPad’, and Google ‘Nexus’)*. While the other, the Microsoft ‘Surface’ has had little reported regarding unethical practice in recent times.

In addition to fitting the decision-making criteria, Apple was chosen due to its combination of both implied popularity with market value hitting $700bn on iPhone 6 sales, and their reported unethical practice regarding Foxconn, *(Bradshaw, 2014; Cooper, 2013)*. Reports have highlighted workers receiving £1.12 per hour for producing iPhones and iPads, as well as 18 suicide attempts in 2009, four deaths and 18 injuries due to explosion in the factory in 2010, *(Cooper, 2013)*.

The Google product was chosen due to the brand recently being reported for tax avoidance. The firms’ strategy found the firm had paid £6m in UK tax on a turnover of £395m, *(Barford and Holt, 2013)*. The two firms see unethical practice and concerns being demonstrated in two very different ways. This therefore provides insight into if and how different forms of unethical practice can affect decision-making.
Sample Criteria and Justification

Saunders (2012), and Reis and Judd (2000) identify the two general classes of sampling; probability sampling, and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling argues accuracy within its results due to the reduction in possible bias, however due to the requirements of the sampling frame, and the given time constraints of the project, a non-probability sample was selected for the research, (Akhilesh, 2007; Reis and Judd, 2000).

As previously stated, within this specific non-probability sample, the criterion for the project was individuals who have; partaken in higher education, are of adult age, and living in the South of England. Hague (1992) suggests the use of quota sampling when there is a specific demographic. Additionally, Saunders (2012) considers quota sampling to be an applicable method when costs are constrained, and data is needed quickly. With the nature of the project, quota sampling was therefore selected.

Bertaux-Wiame (1981) supports this approach and argues researchers should continue with their sample until theoretical saturation, whereby sufficient data is collected and no new concepts emerge, (Douglas 2003; Locke, 2001). Therefore, the sample size was determined through this method, as it appeared sensible not to pre-judge a sample size until data collection was underway. Twenty interviews were completed in total.

Analysis of Data

Literature argues there is not a predefined best method of analysing qualitative data, (Welman et al, 2005). Therefore the analysis concentrated on identifying relationships and comparisons to form conclusions to the established aim and objectives, (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996; McGivern, 2006). To achieve this, interviews were transcribed and summarised for analysis. This information was then organised into accruing themes, with the use of a coding method. Data collected from the interview (Appendix A) was then arranged into code and frequency tally charts, as McGivern (2006) states this method assist in analysing trends. Consequently, these steps allowed relationships between the topics to be identified, as well as forming ideas on how they interacted so that conclusions to the research title could be formed, (Denscombe, 1998; McGivern, 2006; Sapsford and Jupp, 1996).

Further applicable to the data analysis, Denscombe (1998) and McGivern (2006), state interviews should be recorded in addition to note taking to combat the risk of misinterpretation and recollection of the interview. Denscombe (1998) and McGivern (2006) also state this method is more likely to be accepted by participants than for instance video recording. Therefore this method was used to assist with the analysis of data.

Qualitative data analysis tool, Nvivo can be useful in providing immediate access to interpretations and insights, and developing links between them, (Subramaniam, 2007). McGivern (2006) however, states that the alternative method of manual analysis tends to lead to a greater understanding. Graue and Walsh (1998) also argue that a manual analysis method of handling data allows for additional information to be uncovered from memory, and thus turns information into concrete data. As such, a manual analysis tool was utilised.

Coding Method

Instead of the Nvivo analysis tool, the descriptive coding method was used. Within the method of descriptive coding, analysis is based on descriptions of scenarios (Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) argues the method to be easier to categorise the range of opinions from numerous participants, resulting in clearer analysis. Additionally, Tesch (1990) suggests qualitative coding methods can be unclear. Therefore, by using the descriptive coding method, it was thought that results were likely to be more accurate, and combat this assumption.

Ethical Considerations

Denscombe (2010) emphasises standards of research ethics must be observed, this includes; permissions obtained, confidentiality maintained, and identities protected. Consequently, participants were talked through, and given a copy of a briefing document before interview. This made the respondent aware they had the right to withdraw at any point. However, it is important to note that information regarding the study was brief to limit any bias within the interview. The document also informed the right to refuse any questions within the
Results and Discussions
This section entails the results of the primary research and discusses the findings that emerged from the data analysis, with reference to the explored literature. The discussion has been organised into six key themes, some of which entail subheadings. This way the data could be effectively analysed to provide clear conclusions to the question and aim.

Overview of Results
The first theme focuses on the impact of a brand, and its control over an individuals’ perception that is limiting concern for ethics within decision-making. Within this discussion ideas around the media, as well as additional influences from the findings are identified. The results of the primary research also stressed a great lack of awareness amongst respondents, which led to the concept acting as the next key theme. Additionally, a theme regarding the use of scenarios has been developed as the findings prompted interesting, and sometimes contradictory results, including identification of the nature of unethical behaviour, and leading onto where ethics become a consideration. The fifth theme focuses on analysis of a respondents’ post-purchase evaluation in relation to theory, while the final theme acknowledges ideas around government and globalisation in regards to ethics.

Ethics and Brand Analysis
A central finding of the research emerged from the first stage of the interview, the product selection. Contrary to theory stated by Rest (1986) that ethics is within the process of decision-making, not one interviewee stated ‘ethics’ as a reason for their product decision. The results further supported the lack of consideration the interviewees had towards ethics as the majority (95 per cent) choose the Apple iPad tablet, while the other one respondent choose the Google Nexus. This is significant as both these brands products were chosen in the light of their recent reported unethical practice, as stated within the methodology. As such, the findings do conflict with some of the previously identified literature, which implies individuals recognise, and engage in making a moral judgement when making a decision, (Rest, 1986).

Interestingly enough, branding and reputation appeared to be key in participants’ responses, with 80 per cent expressing it as a reason for their purchase. One respondent even admitted being “brand orientated” as a reason for their choice, while other individuals stated their decision of product was made before they had seen the tablet choices:

“Apple, I made my decision before I even looked at the products. Purely based on the fact that I have Apple products, I have an iPhone, a MacBook; it’s their reputation.”

“I always buy Apple, I wouldn’t even consider another brand. I have an iPhone, a MacBook; it is the Apple brand as a whole... I know they are a good brand.”

“The iPad would sync with my other Apple products, they are compatible.”

The interviews uncovered the power that Apple appears to hold over their consumers. The business appears to have successfully built a respectable brand and reputation that leads consumers to subconsciously favour their products. Also strengthening the evident power of Apple, around the time that these interviews were conducted a programme exposing the companies unethical practice was advertised on the popular television channel, BBC. However, contrary to Folkes and Kamins (1999) assumption that unethical behaviour would effect attitudes towards brands, the programme, as well as recent media hype appeared not to have had any affect on their reputation or consumer loyalty, with 30 per cent of respondents even considering ‘trust’ for Apple:
"I don’t trust the others, but I trust Apple."

In regards to the respondent who choose the Google Nexus, again ethics was not a consideration. Instead the product was chosen based on its brand as they stated:

"I am familiar with Google, and I like Google."

Additionally, as Microsoft (with little, if any recent negative press), was not chosen by any participants, it questions the significance of the ‘increasing interest in CSR’, as argued by Campell and Kitson (2008). Consequently, it appears ethics is not essential for business as the brand power overrides any ethical concern. This at least appeared to be the case within the initial stage of the interview whereby ethics as the topic of research was not admitted.

**The relationship between Ethics and the Media**

In addition to brand power, the results of the research project suggest that the media have the ability to change the level of ethical concern consumer’s hold towards business. Respondents admitted being influenced by media coverage:

"When it is in the media, I do tend to take notice and purchase differently"

This influence can be related to the idea of a phase, as although respondents felt the media had played a part in forming their opinion, the lack of awareness that was apparent demonstrated how this media coverage was few and far between, and thus soon forgotten:

"There was something in the press recently, I can’t remember which one it was?"

"Their reputation goes before them, I had completely forgotten about both accounts of business practices"

"In the short-term it affected me, but since I had forgotten"

Consequently, it is clear the media are wielding power in influencing individuals decision-making, as argued by McCombs (1997). It appears the media, who are in fact a business themselves, are dictating these short or long-term trends and as such playing a key role in business compliance to adapt strategy and include ethical practice.

**Additional Influential criteria limiting Ethics**

Respondent’s justification for additional influences provides further insight into the reasons as to why ethics was not considered as a primary factor. One of the common themes that appeared to hold prominence against ethics for the female respondents was the idea of trend, with 60 per cent of females stating it as a reason for product choice:

"Everyone has Apple, it is a trend, and a fashion."

"I go by what is popular."

This supports Ruegger and King (1992) theory as they concluded that gender did contribute to ethical perception, and thus decision-making. Price was also acknowledged as a reason for product choice, however only from 35 per cent of interviewees. This could be attributed to the one-off nature of the purchase. The demographics of the research could also have contributed to this lower than expected percentage.

When comparing the findings with ethical theory, individuals can generally be classified into the consequentialist concept of egoism, particularly as not one respondent considered another individual within their decision. Alternatively, each respondent focused on considerations that affected themselves in pursuit of their
individual desires, (Crane and Matten, 2007). With this in mind, the idea of ethics being essential for business is weakened, as it seems other influences are holding a greater precedence.

**Awareness of Ethical and Unethical business practice**

Gellerman (1986) identified rationalisation for companies unethical behaviour, including the idea that it will never be discovered or publicised, and therefore is ‘safe’. Although not all responses connoted this theory, a high proportion supported the idea through their apparent lack of awareness.

As Appendix A states, the interview subtly hints at the idea of ethics when interviewees were asked on their knowledge regarding Apple and Google’s business practice. Results found that 60 per cent of respondents could not comment on a firm’s business practices. Only a small proportion more admitted they had heard about the stories once they had been discussed, a statement more common than others including the assumption that they are all unethical. One respondent even stated:

"Apple appears to play out their policy line of being an ethical company."

As such a conclusion developed that contrary to Rests (1986) theory stating individuals make moral judgements before engaging in behaviour, the findings suggested individuals were not well informed enough to even consider it within this process:

“I haven’t got much of an idea whether any of them are ethical or not... I would assume that they are.”

“Wow, so actually both Apple and Google are not ethical at all, but I must say I haven’t really seen all of this, so I didn’t know too much about them.”

This would suggest that business could get away with treating ethical practice as optional compliance as consumers are unlikely to be affected anyway. An interesting point was also made about the acknowledgement of ethical firms, recognising that their publicity is often sheltered compared those engaging in unethical practice:

“You hear about the unethical companies, but not the ethical”

“We need the ethical companies to speak out and say they are ethical so we have another choice when purchasing”

Therefore, even when a firm is acting ethically, the results suggest they are not benefiting, or ‘doing well by doing good’ as theory suggested, (Karnani (2010, p.69).

**Unethical business practice**

Despite these reactions to the acknowledgment of Google and Apple’s unethical practice, the awareness did not appear to affect the majority of decisions when asked if the respondent would reconsider their original choice. This is significant as influence of ethics was forced into the decision-making process here, yet the deontological approach still resulted in 95 per cent stating they would go for the same product. Again this conflicts the theory that consumers experience negative attitudes towards unethical businesses as argued by Folkes and Kamins, (1999):

“I wasn’t aware of any unethical practice, but I would still go for the Apple”

“Ultimately its not important enough for me to change my mind.”

“A company should be ethical to society. However, it doesn’t matter because they create such strong and powerful brands that its not going to affect my decision as a consumer.”
The considerations identified for this were identical, if not at least similar to the reasons of choice previously mentioned when ethics was not an acknowledged factor. For instance price, whereby 25 per cent again considered it as a limiting factor to their consideration of ethics.

“Doesn’t bother me, I would rather be concerned about costs”

“I want it to be a good investment for myself. It’s a lot of money, and I want to make the right choice for me.”

In addition to the factors that were originally stated as reason to limit their consideration of ethics, other key perspectives that both compliment and conflict literature emerged. A high proportion, (60 per cent) of respondents connoted ideas of Friedman’s (1970) theory, stating:

“All companies are in business to make money, no other reason, they have a duty to their shareholders and the bottom line is that they need to make money”

“Business is business, and alive to create wealth and employment”

The reactions provide evidence to compliment Friedman’s (1970) argument of business, as analysis of participants from both coding, and recordings support the idea that business is for wealth creation, and thus why would ethics hold place within business strategy? Further to the acceptance of Friedman (1970) theory that the majority expressed at least some relation to, greater examination found the type of firm’s behaviour that was being questioned to have a significant affect on responses. For instance, tax avoidance, which Google have been publicised for, was considered more accepted as a means of business than Apple’s exploitation. Surprisingly, this conclusion was fuelled to the extent of respondents applauding businesses for acting in this way:

“Good for them. Any company that doesn’t try and avoid tax is stupid”

“Avoid tax, pass the saving onto the consumer”

“They need to make a cost saving to the consumer somewhere”

With the majority of respondents still stating they would go for the same product, and those supporting questionable or ‘grey area’ business practice, ethical theory would suggest that businesses are justifying their actions through utilitarianism. As in this case, the business is producing the favoured product to the consumer, resulting in the greatest number of individuals experiencing happiness.

Another reason for not considering ethics even with their new awareness can be attributed to lack of influence individuals felt they had on society. 35 per cent of respondents couldn’t see the value in considering ethics as they felt that individually they could not make a difference, and therefore what was the point in missing out on their own self gain?

“It’s really down to the organisation to change what they are doing, and one person not buying from them is not going to influence their strategy.”

“I can’t make a difference by myself, so why should I stop buying it?”

Although implying links between responses and utilitarianism, in reality it seems the outcome fits respondents more with the theory of egoism, as ultimately their belief is in the pursuit of individual desires. The quotations also appear to question ethical business theory as it seems consumers are buying regardless of ethics, and thus a company will not ‘do better’ through incorporating ethics within their strategy, as argued by Falck and Heblich (2007).
Scenario analysis and Ethical considerations

In contrast to the first stage of the interview, the second involving questions regarding scenarios provided results as to how consumers fit with ethical theory when placed within theoretical situations. Interestingly enough, some conclusions were found contradictory to respondent’s previous statements. As such, the technique appeared successful in creating a realistic situation to influence the individual, as originally argued by Carrigan and Atalla (2001). The method also drew further conclusions on how individuals hold different perspectives depending on the nature of unethical behaviour.

Scenario one

Responses to scenario one were typical of the previous answers, as despite 65 per cent recognising the scenario as ‘unethical’, 80 per cent of respondents still maintained that their perception of the brand had not been altered. Additionally, 70 per cent stated they would shop with the retailer and store again. Similar to answers provided within the first stage of the interview, branding again appeared to play a major role within the reason for purchase, whereby unethical behaviour was overlooked for the sake of trend and brand reputation, some explaining how the brand was not wrong:

“The brand haven’t done anything thing, it’s the individual”

“If there is something I really like, I will buy it.”

The nature of Unethical behaviour (Scenario two and three)

On the other hand, scenarios two and three provoked a different perspective within respondents. The two scenarios have been grouped for analysis to highlight the interesting finding that emerged. Firstly, scenario two which mimicked the recent Amazon tax avoidance scandal, but without the brand name being exposed, found 40 per cent of respondents considering it ‘unethical’, while the majority (60 per cent) considering it as either ‘ethical’ or ‘unethical, but not illegal so it is okay’:

“Unethical, but I could be swayed because it’s not illegal”

“Unethical but we are all taxed so much so why not? It’s not illegal, or harming anyone and is the Governments role to control, not ours.”

As previously stated, the results found the subject of tax avoidance quite controversial with a surprisingly high number of individuals considering it as morally acceptable as it isn’t illegal, a reason Gellerman (1986) argues companies act unethically. Gellerman (1986) theory also suggests why the results are comfortable with such practice as he argues unethical behaviour is accepted if it is in the ‘best interest of the corporation or individual’.

The results strengthen Cavanaugh et al (1981) argument that perceptions can be highly problematic, giving greater emphasis to the controversial ‘grey area’ within ethics, which the tax avoidance scenario would fall into. Rests (1986) ethical decision-making theories can also be analysed here at it appears there is an issue within the first stage of the process, as recognising and making a moral judgement on issues within the ‘grey area’ has demonstrated to be problematic. Unsurprisingly 65 per cent of respondents were happy with purchase within scenario two, while 90 per cent expressed no change in their perception of the brand, and 95 per cent stated they would shop with them again.

Alternatively, scenario three prompted much greater concern with all recognising the situation as ‘unethical’, even if they accepted it as business practice. A common point raised was the issue of children working, with 55 per cent of respondents expressing concern:

“This is highly unethical, the issue of children working affects me. It doesn’t matter if everyone else is doing it, it is wrong.”

“Unethical, they are exploiting children”
“Even if it is common practice, with universal human rights children should not be working.”

When compared with scenario two which did not probe such strong beliefs, the results found that ethics appeared to play a greater concern when harm to humans, in particular children, was a possibility, or at least more obvious. Instead of mirroring traits associated with egoism as done previously, respondents expressed concern on principles of collective welfare, and acting through utilitarianism as argued by Bentham, (1776). In addition to the expression for collective welfare, 30 per cent did state that they would no longer be able to purchase products from the brand they had witnessed first-hand acting unethically:

“I wouldn’t be able to purchase from them again. People don’t realise but seeing it would make it real, so people would consider it more”

“To actually be there would make a difference. It would change my perception of the brand, and my decision-making”

Here, Morris (2004) theory is supported as the example illustrates how individuals are recognising that their decision is likely to have significant affects on others. One respondent even stated:

“I would rather pay extra to ensure better working conditions”

Despite this increase in consideration for ethics, 30 per cent stated they would think twice, but still purchase from the brand, while 40 per cent stated they would purchase from the brand again, demonstrating that the scenario had little effect on them:

“It would make me think twice, and I’d be open to try different brands, however it definitely wouldn’t stop me”

“Although I feel it is highly unethical, I would still buy the product. When I heard about Primark’s business practice I still brought from them because of their ability to produce low-cost fashion and trends.”

As such, it seems egoism was still present within 70 per cent of the respondents as the ultimate decision came back to the concept of pursuing individuals’ long, or short-term desires. Therefore, as all recognised the scenario as unethical, findings again pointed at ethics as a secondary consideration for individuals with trends, and fashion acting as a common justification for respondent’s decision.

Additionally, an interesting finding was made when comparing scenario three and stage ones previous question regarding Apple’s unethical practice. Scenario three was to some extent picked to reflect the type of unethical behaviour that Apple has been reported for engaging in. As discussed within scenario three 30 per cent of individuals thought twice about their purchase, while another 30 per cent stated they would not be able to purchase from the brand again. However, only 5 per cent of respondents stated they would not buy the product again when it was identified as Apple. Therefore when these results are compared, it seems the brand itself again is playing a crucial role in limiting consumer’s consideration of ethics within decision-making. This conflicts with Folkes and Kamins (1999) assumption that unethical behaviour would affect attitudes towards brands, as it is the brand itself that appears to be limiting the ability to make moral judgements. Results therefore suggest ethical practice to be essential or optional, dependent upon the brand itself.

**Ethics as a Consideration**

In addition to findings from the scenarios, stage four of the interview entailing direct questions regarding the individuals ethical considerations or lack of, during their decision-making found certain topics to gain much higher consideration than others. As discussed within the scenario analysis, child labour was a topic that gained much concern; with respondents expressing the issue as ‘highly unethical’. While scenarios around tax avoidance were generally considered more acceptable, hence that they have been placed within the grey area. In addition to the considerations, the direct questioning of ethics led to the issue of animal cruelty being a major...
concern for respondents, hence its place within the ‘unethical’ area. When asked if respondents considered ethics within their purchases, out of the 55 per cent of individuals who claimed they did, 45 per cent stated that animal cruelty was a reason for their consideration:

“Animals don’t have a choice.”

“I like to buy a lot from Body Shop because I know it hasn’t been tested on animals.”

“Animal cruelty sways me to purchase other brands”

The finding that consumers hold a care for goes hand in hand with the finding that 50 per cent of respondents consider ethics within their retail food purchases, stating they would pay more for free-range:

“Mainly when I buy food, I do think about ethics. Mainly because I’ve seen things about animal cruelty and I really disagree with it.”

“I always buy free-range eggs, there’s not much difference in price.”

“I tend to buy meat from a local butcher who knows where the meat has come from. I would rather pay more in this instance.”

“Food. We only buy free-range, organic, or from the butchers.”

As such, the findings here illustrate that the majority of respondents do have specific ethical concerns within purchases, which in turn supports the theory that a ‘company can do well by doing good’ as stated by Falck and Heblich (2007), such as for instance the Body Shop, as 10 per cent of respondents stated they shopped with this brand for their ethical reputation. Similarly, in regards to food purchases the findings suggests local butchers, free-range, and organic produce tend to be more popular due to their ethical nature. Rests (1986) ethical decision-making theory is applicable here as individuals have ‘recognised a moral issue’, and ‘made a moral judgement’ as the process suggests.

The other interesting finding regarding the respondents’ conscious ethical considerations was regarding Primark. Here, 10 per cent of respondents expressed disbelief for their pricing strategy and voiced worries linked to the ‘unethical’ business practice:

“I stopped buying as much from Primark, I’ve read articles about their practice regarding children and its really put me off.”

“I don’t believe you can produce those goods for such a small amount of money, there must be exploitation.”

Here, Jobber and Fahy (2009) theory stating an evaluation of alternatives is within the decision-making process seems to be supported as the findings have illustrated how individuals have substituted for ethical purchase in light of new information, as per the above quotes. Additionally Rest’s (1986) theory of ethical decision-making is applicable, as individuals appear to have engaged in recognising a moral issue, and as such figures 4 and 5 seem of high relevance to the consumers ethical decision-making process. Ultimately, these findings suggest that a combination of ethics and decision-making as illustrated by figure 6 is applicable, or at least within specific product areas. Therefore business need to consider ethical practice if operating within the discussed industries, as findings suggest consumers would be more likely to consider the ethical brand. Additionally it seems the idea of harm to living beings is crucially influential, as the issue of children being exploited were considered unethical, and now animals.
Post-purchase Evaluation
Within Jobber and Fahy’s (2009) theory of decision-making they argue that consumers go through a ‘Post-Purchase evaluation decision’. Findings from the research supported this theory, as the idea of consumer ‘guilt’ argued by Burnett and Lunsford, (1994), became a constant. A post-purchase emotion was clearly triggered as some individuals stated they would not be able to purchase from particular brands anymore as previously discussed. Burnett and Lunsfords (1994) theory of ‘moral and social guilt’ took particular relevance as 20 per cent of respondents expressed this emotion as an afterthought, or post-purchase evaluation, within the interview:

“I feel a bit guilty after knowing that, it has made me think about it a bit more now.”

In regards to Burnett and Lunsfords (1994) theory of anticipation guilt, not one respondent stated guilt as a constant before purchase. However, findings discussed regarding reasons for ethical considerations within their own purchase criteria does imply this form of guilt, as the individuals who expressed concern deliberately avoided the purchase within the initial stage. With this in mind, compared to the 20 per cent who expressed post-purchase guilt, for instance after being made aware of Apple or Google’s unethical practice, the lack of awareness of ethical and unethical business practice acknowledged within the findings can be closely linked as reason for the absence of this emotion within the pre, and post-purchase stage. Alternatively, Cavanaugh et al (1981) theory highlighting the complexity of individual’s perception of ethics could also provide reason for lack of guilt illustrated amongst respondents.

Despite this, even with awareness, the affect on purchasing appears fairly limited as some respondents who did acknowledge emotions of guilt stated that ultimately it wouldn’t affect their decision-making:

“There is a sense of guilt buying from them, however ethics is a secondary factor”

Consequently, although the idea of guilt was not probed, the findings illustrate that the majority of respondents did not express any feeling of post-purchase guilt. Therefore suggesting that unethical practice would only affect a minority of consumers in regards to their future decision-making. However, the acknowledged lack of awareness within respondents further suggests that an individuals’ decision-making is unlikely to be affected by unethical purchase unless this factor were to significantly alter, thus weakening the theory that business’s ethical compliance is essential.

The Role Government and Influence of Globalisation
Within the findings, another key theme regarding the role of government and globalisation emerged. Results found that some respondents accepted the exploitation that can occur on a global scale, recognising the difficulty that managing it would entail. Some respondents even expressed that is was the nature of the supply chain today:

“With globalisation these things happen”

“Its too difficult to manage the problem of unethical practice on a global scale.”

“Isn’t it better these overseas workers have a job then nothing at all?”

“With such huge corporations, corruption is inevitable.”

“Supply chains are so complex now, the issue is within this supply chain and not the brand itself.”

Findings suggest the theory of ‘ethical relativism’ as respondents appeared to accept the practice as it is the norm within that culture, and thus suggesting it would be too difficult to reach a universal ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Despite this, 40 per cent of respondents were witnessed to examine practice as they too recognised globalisation as a factor limiting ethical practice:
“Brands are exploiting the corruption of the overseas countries. Were they this corrupt when business wasn’t on a global scale?”

“Globalisation is the problem. If a company in the UK accepts it, its just as bad as the country who’s inflecting the rules”.

Interestingly enough, respondents also started questioning why global ethics was not achieved, demonstrating theory of ‘ethical absolutism’, which suggests morals are universally applicable, and therefore ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ can be rationally determined, (De George, 1999). Utilitarianism regarding principles of collective welfare is also present amongst respondents here. Furthermore, the concept of justice and rawisianism is expressed as respondents questioned why standards within the UK couldn’t be met on a global scale, thus suggesting all individuals should have equal access to basic rights:

“Its not okay for the UK, so why there? Especially if it’s a western firm that is using the factory as they should be using factories that have the same standards as where they are from”

“They should take into account global ethics when they outsource abroad.”

“It is ridiculous that we can import products that don’t have to comply with our standards”

Findings here suggest consumers are recognising globalisation to inhibit ethics. In addition, respondents went on to express care and concern for the global scale problem as they expressed beliefs that something needed to change:

“We don’t expect this in the UK so it shouldn’t be right on a global scale. The chain needs to be broken.”

Linked with the notion of globalisation, government became a topic of discussion as respondents tended to blame the institution, or at least express how governing bodies should be doing more to combat the predicament of trading on a global scale. Responses in regards to tax avoidance also strongly expressed this belief as they saw the government responsible for enforcing tougher regulation and policy:

“Tax avoidance is unethical but its not breaking any laws, this is where the government need to step up.”

“The policy is wrong, not the business”

“Government should be controlling tax avoidance”

“While every company should be working ethically, government should be sorting loop-holes for tax, and enforcing universal human rights”

This ties in with the 35 per cent of respondents who expressed no intention to change their behaviour, as they didn’t feel their individual change could impact enough to make a difference:

“I can’t make a difference by myself so what’s the point?”

“We can’t impose laws on underdeveloped countries. It’s out of our control, and business is exploiting that”

As such, the results suggest that with active government support perhaps more individuals would be more likely to consider ethics as a primary consideration within decision-making, and thus forcing business to hold greater consideration of ethical practice within their business due to a potentially adapted consumer perspective.
Additional Findings

Some additional points that don’t quite quantify as a theme also emerged from the research project. The initial stage of the interview entailed asking respondents about their personal circumstances, including current occupation. As the data collection progressed a link was distinguished between answers that were typically given between private and public sector workers. Individuals within the specific sector tended to give similar responses to others who worked within the same sector. The data illustrated those respondents who worked within the private sector tended to hold a greater acceptance for unethical business practice, while those who worked within the public sector tended to express greater concern for unethical business practice. This was particularly the case for topics within the ‘grey area’:

“Tax avoidance is unethical. Why should individuals pay it when businesses don’t?” - Teacher, Public sector

“Tax avoidance is wrong. No-one, or business should engage in this behaviour as it affects society as a whole.”
- Court Usher, Public sector

“In regards to tax avoidance, I would assume that everyone would do the same to act competitively, so why not?” - Advisory IT Specialist, Private sector

The occupation itself also appeared to play a role in determining respondents’ beliefs as those who worked within the private sector in a financial role tended to have a greater acceptance of issues regarding tax avoidance:

“Tax avoidance is acceptable. I think people are hypocrites if they say they wouldn’t do it. I think everyone would do it if they knew how” – Financial Controller, Private sector

“A business would be stupid not to exploit the tax loop-holes.” – Accountant, Private sector

The results suggest there could be a relationship between occupation and beliefs regarding ethical decision-making, an influence argued more loosely as ‘work experience’ by Reis and Mitra (1998). Despite this trend, this was not part of the original criteria, and thus there is not enough evidence to support the theory. Therefore, this finding can merely act as an assumption until further research is carried out.

Summary of Results and Discussion

Analysis and discussion of the results have identified how individuals conform to a variety of ethical theories outlined by academics. The findings have also discovered how respondents’ fit with the theories of ethical decision-making established by Rest, (1986) and, Jobber and Fahy, (2009). The findings not only complimented but also contradicted these theories as research uncovered that ethics was not always a constant within the decision-making process as argued by Rest, 1986). In regards to the ethical decision-making process influences were acknowledged including the power of brands, and media, a theory argued by McCombs (1997). Despite gender evidently playing a role within decision-making in regards to trend, research did contradict studies by Ruegger and King (1992) as the results did not identify a relationship between age and beliefs. However, research by Reis and Mitra (1998) did appear supported as findings suggested a possible link work experience and ethical considerations.

Additionally, Folkes and Kamins, (1999) theory of individuals holding positive attitudes to ethical brands, and the opposite to unethical only appeared effective to an extent, as results illustrated how brand power can have a greater influence over this initial feeling of ‘right’, or ‘wrong’, or ‘ethical absolutism’, as argued by De George (1999). Closely linked here, Kaler (1999) and Cavanaugh et al (1981) theories regarding perspectives was supported as findings illustrated the complexity of recognising issues as ‘moral’ or not, providing reason for the development of a ‘grey area’ within ethical theory as argued by Crane and Matten (2007). Results found that issues not causing physical harm to individuals, such as scenarios around lying, or tax avoidance, were more accepted and thus fall within this grey area.
Findings also found a relationship between ethics and lack of awareness that respondents presented. Gellerman (1986) theory became apparent here, as business appears to be acting successfully in rationalising unethical practice as they feel no one will find out. However, this awareness not having a significant effect on purchasing decisions did see Friedman’s (1970) theory regarding aims of business to be accurate. Despite this, when unethical practice was acknowledged, results did credit Burnett and Lundfords (1994) theory of guilt, which was expressed by 20 per cent of individuals.

Analysis of the results and discussion also suggested a relationship between ethical beliefs and occupation. A link between specific products and ethical considerations was also recognised, for instance the finding that food purchases tended to hold greater ethical consideration then technology products. As such, these two trends affecting consumer’s ethical considerations for business practice could provide to be an interesting area of future research.

Conclusions
The major conclusion that can be drawn from this research project indicates that from a consumer’s perspective, ethical considerations are heavily influenced and inhibited by a variety of factors, and thus the debate around business compliance to ethics is limited in itself and only applicable to a certain degree. As such the research both complemented and contradicted current literature, drawing conclusions in its own right.

Involvement of the respondents in identifying a specific product choice (Appendix A, stage 2) assisted in forming a significant conclusion in regards to the power brands hold over consumers, a strong factor that literature regarding ethical influences had previously overlooked. This theory appeared to play a key role in inhibiting ethical decision-making theories argued by Rest, (1986), and Jobber and Fahy, (2009), as ethics was not once recognised as a consideration for purchase. However results did support literature regarding additional influences including the power of the media, gender, and work experience as argued by McCombs (1997), and Reis and Mitra (1998). Although again, these influences led ethics to have little, if any effect on consumers perception when a brand holds such a strong reputation. As such, the findings found truth in Friedman’s (1970) theory, which justifies unethical business practice, enforcing the aim of business ‘to create wealth and employment’.

Findings also identified a major lack of awareness amongst individuals, thus again contradicting theories of decision-making as research found individuals were not informed enough to ‘recognise a moral issue’, or ‘make a moral judgement’, as claimed by Rests (1986), nor had respondents considered an ‘information search, and evaluation of alternatives’ as suggested by Jobber and Fahy (2009) theory. Here ethics seemed secondary in nature, as it was not searched for. Instead awareness of unethical behaviour appeared to constitute as a phase dependent upon media, as individuals admitted to quickly forgetting the news regarding unethical business practice. As such, the research found McCombs (1997) theory regarding the media to be apparent, however only for a limited short-term period. Despite this, Jobber and Fahys (2009) idea of ‘Post-Purchase evaluation’ did appear to hold relevance as with an awareness, individuals expressed post-purchase feelings of guilt, a theory previously argued by Burnett and Lunsford (1994). The results in this case conclude the lack of awareness represented to be a major inhibitor to the influence of ethics.

In addition, Cavanaugh et al (1981) belief of perceptions being highly problematic sustained to be an applicable theory in relation to the primary research, as it is believed to be common reason for issues such as tax avoidance falling into the ‘grey area’ of ethics amongst the results. Similarly, this acceptance of ethical behaviour led to the conclusion that ethics as a concern is dependent upon the severity of unethical practice, with behaviour relating to issues of physical harm to a human or animal holding a greater ethical concern, a finding that previous literature seems to have ignored. Therefore concluding that both Rest (1986), and Jobber and Fahy’s, (2009) theories of decision-making are applicable to an extent as consumers illustrated that they did base
Consequently, the findings cannot conclude a definite answer to whether companies’ compliance to business ethics is an essential, or optional consideration within strategy from a consumer’s perspective. Instead, results can conclude that compliance to business ethics is dependant on a variety of hindering factors, which inhibit the effectiveness of ethics. As such, business ethics appears essential dependent upon the specific brand, product area, current media speculation, and influences relating to the specific individual. This conclusion has been formed from the general findings of the results, which found the respondents to typically fit with ethical theory of utilitarianism, whereby despite expression of ethical concerns, individuals ultimately tended to make decisions dependent upon their individual short, or long-term desires.

However, these findings should be accepted under consideration of the research methodology. Although being successful in achieving the stated aim and objectives, upon reflection the use of an alternative method such as a focus group could also of been effective, as the results from the interviews did appear fairly similar. Therefore, the concern stated previously by Choi and Kim, 1999, Janis, 1982 of ‘groupthink’ and ‘group shift’ may not have been problematic. As (Krueger and Casey 2009) argues, the idea of a focus group may have also probed interesting debates between respondents, and thus drawn further conclusions. Despite this, the method of face-to-face interviews did provide great opportunity in gain in-depth responses as previously stated by Hague, Hague, and Morgan (2004), and as such, the idea of a focus group could be have been employed merely as a method of comparing results between the two approaches.

Similarly, the conclusions need to consider that the results were obtained from a chosen selection of individuals. Upon reflection, it may have been interesting to explore a variety of groups within the sample, for instance from a variety of locations, and a number of professions, to analyse whether the same conclusions arose. However, the method employed here was effective given the project limitations.

Furthermore, upon reflection the analysis tool of Nvivo may have been a quicker method to employ, and also may have highlighted additional links between themes as argued by Subramaniam, (2007). Therefore, if a similar future project were to be carried out, this method would be suggested. With this in mind, the conclusions need to consider the methodology that was employed.

**Project Limitations**

These conclusions are influenced by the limitations of the research. These factors could not be controlled and included restrictions on equipment, time, and costs, (Anderson, Gruse and Haug 2009; Lowery 2001). Firstly, with time being as a crucial element, the project was limited to collecting samples from specific locations available, being the South of England. Additionally, projects budget acted as a limitation as it restricted the number, and types of resources available, a problem identified by Lowery, (2001). Therefore, other than the data collected from interviewees, resources were restrained to literature available through the University, as well as availability online.

**Project Delimitations**

Similar to the limitations of the project, the conclusions are also influenced by delimitations, which refer to the boundaries, and characteristics that could be controlled, (Simon, 2011). This includes the decision to use a non-random sample concentration, which complemented the aim to evaluate research from a consumer perspective. Within this sample another delimitation can be recognised, as there was a specific criteria for the interviewee. This was also a deliberate delimitation to obtain relevant data required in order to make accurate comparisons, and combat any ambiguity within the data collected, (McGivern, 2006). Additionally, the limitation of time, and resources identified by Lowery (2001), Anderson, Gruse and Haug (2009) led to the deliberate consideration not to include data collection from businesses themselves. This factor also inevitably caused delimitation in the sample size collected.


**Suggestions for Future Research**

Through analysis of the research and findings including the acknowledgment of themes that hold limited evidence, suggestions for future research have been identified. As discussed, a reflection of the research project has questioned if the results would differ dependent upon the methodology employed. Therefore, the idea of the same research project with the use of focus groups rather than face-to-face interviews has been suggested. Similarly, a change in demographic could also provide some interesting comparisons to this projects conclusions.

Furthermore, as mentioned, the research uncovered an interesting relationship between the concept of ethical perception, and sector that individuals worked within. Results suggested that those working within the public sector tended to hold stronger ethical beliefs than those working within the private sector. Further analysis suggested this relationship to the extent of occupation acting as reason for respondent’s perception. However, as both these factors were not specifically part of the research sample criteria, the accuracy of this result is limited, and thus leads to an interesting topic for future research.

In addition, results from the direct questioning stage of interview found that consumers ethical concern tended to be greater within some industries than others, with purchases relating to animals, and similarly food, generally causing respondents to place more ethical consideration on their decisions and concern for business practice. However, this research project focused on one type of product, a digital tablet. Therefore as the findings suggest a potential link between ethics, industry, and product type, again another area for future research can be suggested.

**References**


Appendix

Interview structure
Business Ethics: Optional or Essential for Business? – A Case Study into the Retail Industry.

Introduction
- Brief introduction to myself, including the University I attend.
- Explain the purpose of the research I am studying. However, note I will only mention an unspecific purpose of the research into Business Ethics to assure no bias occurs.
- Talk through the interview briefing document
- Ask for permission to tape the interview
- Mention that there are no right or wrong answers, the assessment is to find underlying beliefs so an honest answer is the best answer, and all views are valid.

Main Body
Stage 1 - Questions to assure the individual meets the specific criterion
1. First Name
2. Age/age range, 18-29, 30-55, 56+.
3. Highest level of educational study
4. What degree they studied
5. Current location they live in
6. Current occupation if any

Stage 2 – Influences on ethical decision-making
Choice between the products: Apple iPad, Microsoft Surface, Google Nexus.

State that if help is required in order to understanding terminology you are happy to help, and whilst they are looking ask if there is information they would normally look for that has not been supplied.

1. Ask the interviewee what criteria they considered when making their decision on which product they would go for. Probe at what factors came into consideration, and why.
2. Ask whether the interviewee believes each of the businesses are ethical or unethical. Probe – reasons for this, does this matter to them, should this matter to society?
3. Discuss the businesses:
   - Apple: China and Foxconn
   - Google: Tax avoidance
   Ask the interviewee their opinion on the topics. Probe to find their awareness of the stories, and whether it would affect their decision making.
4. Ask the interviewee if they would still go for the same product, why. If they choose a product from an unethical brand, ask how they feel about their decision – probe whether the role of guilt comes into play, or any other factors of post-purchase. (Discover if by creating awareness of ethical behaviour, whether it would change the decision-making for individuals).

Stage 3 - Ethical values - Case studies of scenarios

Read the scenarios and act the interviewee questions:
Scenario 1: You go to buy a pair of shoes at a retailer in town. A friendly shop assistant helps you with your purchase. While you are trying the shoes on, the shop assistant informs you that it is the last pair in the store. This sways your decision to purchase the shoes, and you leave the store happy with your purchase. However, you later discover it was not the only pair left.
- Is this ethical or unethical?
- How do you feel about your purchase?
- Has this changed your perception of the brand?
- Would you shop with them again?

Scenario 2: You are shopping online with a retailer you frequently use. Later that day you are informed via the news that the retailer you have purchased from has been reported to have partaken in UK tax avoidance schemes, so that they have only
paid £1.8m on UK sales of £3.35bn.

- Is this ethical or unethical?
- How do you feel about your purchases?
- Has this changed your perception of the brand?
- Would you shop with them again?

**Scenario 3:** You work as a product manager for an electrical goods company. Your boss has asked you to visit a potentially new supplier in their factory in Thailand. The supplier is a great fit for the company’s strategy involving lowering production costs. However, while wondering around the factory, you notice children working who are under the minimum age of 16. You also notice that the employees had to stand to work throughout the entire time you were there, (6 hours), without noticing any breaks being issued. A Thai colleague informs you this is common within this part of the country.

- Is this ethical or unethical?
- Do you report these issues back to your boss?
- Would you purchase the specific products that were being produced now having discovered these issues?

**Stage 4 – Direct questioning of ethical/unethical decision-making regarding retail purchases**

1. Do you include ethical considerations into your decision when you are making a purchase and if so in what kind of purchases?
   a. If yes, what purchases, how and why? Was the purchase purely based on its ethical reputation?
   b. If no, is there any reason for this?
2. Have you ever chosen one product over another based on the firm’s ethical/unethical behaviour?
3. Do you expect ethical behaviour from firms?
4. Do you feel you are informed enough about businesses ethical/unethical behaviour?
5. What do you think of recent media that has highlighted unethical practice? Has this changed your purchasing decision-making? Probe – would you change your purchasing choices now having acknowledged, and discussed ethical concerns around business?

**Concluding the interview**
State that the interview is almost at the end, and ask whether if there is anything that they would like to add to the statements that they have made, or any other general points relating to the topic.

Thank them for taking part and stop the recording.