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Ethical Consumption as an Indicator and a Resource for Civil Society Transformation in Russia

The paper examines the phenomenon of “voting for a better world with your wallet”, a highly controversial and debatable type of ethical consumption. Based on the synthesis and systematic review of the extant scholarship, the study justifies the reasons for academic disputes and advances hypotheses contributing to the development of a holistic model of ethical consumer choice which takes into consideration characteristics of consumers, products and the environment as well as two facets of ethical consumer identity — a civic (care for *common* good) and a consumer one (a focus on the *private* interest).

Representative survey data (surveys of 2014, 2017, and November, 2020 during the pandemic, N=2000 in each case) revealed the dynamics and characteristics of the substantive composition of consumer types voicing differing positions on ethical purchasing (actual”, “potential”, and “indifferent”).

Applying the regression analysis tools, we have estimated the relationship between specific factors and a probability for consumer of being included in various types.

Special attention has been paid to identifying a comparative role of pro environmental (prosocial) and individualistic aspirations. We found out that the concern for the common good manifests the strongest relationship with the probability of actually making ethical purchases, although the relationship with the private benefit is also significant. A positive relationship has been established between the engagement in ethical consumption practices and the diversity of Russians’ traditional prosocial activity outside of the consumption sphere. It has been shown, however, that owing to the “voting with your wallet”, Russian civil society displays not only in-depth development but also develops extensively owing to the involvement of new participants as a result of easy access to practices.

It has been shown that along with the increase in the numbers of actual ethical consumers, their quality is also changing, and the key change is associated with the younger generation coming onto the scene.

The paper substantiates the conclusion that the development of independent activity exercised by ethically-minded consumers signals the transformation of civil society, its tools and spheres of influence. However, the realization of the consumer potential of citizens as agents of

change is highly dependent on the available possibilities related to the activity of other stakeholders (businesses, NGOs, authorities).