Alienating or Engaging?
The Role of Ontological Security and Consumer Coping in Complex Sustainable Consumption Environments - the Case of Certified Wine

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STUDENT DECLARATION

The work in this project was undertaken in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Melbourne for the degree of Master of Environment. The views expressed are those of the author and might not reflect the views of the University of Melbourne or the Office for Environmental Programs.

Larissa Barrows | 212014

18/11/2019
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Last but not least to my wonderful family, my husband Ross and my adorable children Jonah, Saskia, and Leo, thank you for your endless encouragement and support. Having children gives my work on sustainability meaning and purpose well beyond an academic and industry contribution.
ABSTRACT

Consumers are in many ways made to be one of the central actors in the discourse on transitions to more sustainable consumption and production models globally. Consumption naturally spans across many industries, but one of the most significant contributors to environmental degradation, entwined in daily consumption practices, is the agriculture and food system sector. Driven, in part by market-driven and neoliberal regimes and approaches to agricultural management, private regulation, including sustainability certification have emerged strongly in the past few decades.

The purpose of this research is to explore the role of sustainability certification in shifting consumer behaviour to adopt more sustainable consumption practices by taking a deeper look at consumer engagement with sustainable consumption and associated certification schemes. To probe these central questions, this paper turns to theories of trust, ontological security and coping to understand how consumers process the demands of sustainable consumption and how certification plays into this processing. An inductive, grounded theory approach was taken in analysing semi-structured interview data from 14 one-on-one interviews and one friendship group with 7 participants.

Findings from the study allowed construction of a novel theoretical model which describes consumer responses to the interaction with, as well as opportunities and demands of sustainable consumption. In drawing on Giddens’ framework of ontological security and theories of coping, the model makes the following four contributions to theory: (1) It maps consumers’ dynamic coping responses as called for in the coping literature (Skinner et al., 2003), (2) it extends our view of rational and emotional trust as underlying drivers of security, (3) it demonstrates new states of ontological security (as called for by Phipps and Ozanne (2017), and (4) it extends our view and definition of ‘disruption’ and associated consumer responses.
Importantly it explores an area of ‘untouchable’ security, where consumers have effectively resigned from sustainable consumption efforts, and questions to what extent collective sustainable consumption offerings may indeed be alienating consumers from sustainability transitions. The findings also develop a series of hypothesis for the implications of certification as it relates to the theoretical model.

This research was undertaken in the context of the Australia domestic wine industry, using the industry’s sustainability certification, Sustainable Winegrowing Australia, as a case study.

Keywords: sustainable consumption, ontological security, coping, certification, hedonic consumption
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1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The environmental impacts of post-industrial agriculture and food systems have contributed to shaping responsible production and consumption discourse and practice. Agriculture and the associated food system supply chain—including overconsumption, dietary choices and waste—is responsible for 30% of greenhouse gas emissions globally (Godfray and Garnett, 2014) and is a leading cause of deforestation, biodiversity loss, aquifer depletion and soil degradation, among others (Reganold and Wachter, 2016). On many levels, planet earth is stretched beyond its capacity to sustain the status quo food system for a growing population, highlighting the need for significant adjustments to production and consumption (Springmann et al., 2018). International policy has responded to global environmental threats and degradation (United Nations, 2015; United Nations Environment Program, 2015; IPCC, 2018), with the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals, dedicating one of the seventeen goals to “Responsible Consumption and Production” (United Nations, 2015; United Nations Environment Program, 2015).

New forms of governance that extend outside the traditional sovereign and international policy arena have emerged in response to urgent, yet unresolved, environmental crises. These include private standards and voluntary self-regulation such as eco-labelling or sustainable certification and aim to remove information asymmetries between producers and consumers, particularly under extended agricultural and food supply chains (Fouilleux and Loconto, 2017; FAO, 2018).

Global and national sustainable labelling and certification schemes, currently numbering 463 across 199 countries (Ecolabel Index, 2019) are far from homogenous in their application—as is the consumer response. Extant studies observe variations in consumers’ knowledge, action and attitudes toward sustainable certification across product categories (Luchs et al., 2010) cultural context, and geographic location (Grunert, Hieke and Wills, 2014; Eckhardt, Belk and Devinney, 2016). Thus, to build on the existing body of knowledge, a more nuanced
assessment can be achieved by analysing consumer attitudes and behaviours toward sustainably produced and certified products in a specific category and context. In this research the Australian national sustainable wine certification scheme, Sustainable Winegrowing Australia (formerly known as Entwine) forms part of the study’s foundation. Given the importance of non-state regulatory mechanisms such as certification, this research investigates: (1) the dynamic drivers underpinning consumer engagement with sustainable certified and labelled goods; and, (2) the opportunities and limitations of consumer behaviour change through sustainability certification to support a transition to more sustainable consumption and production.

This study initially draws on the literature considering sustainable wine consumption to focus our attention on the debates in this research context, particularly the importance of trust formation as a key driver for consumer engagement. Trust is then further explored and deconstructed through the lenses of ontological security and coping. Next, the research proceedings explain the rich collection of empirical consumer data and insights. Finally, through the discussion of the findings, linkages to existing knowledge and my own theoretical model, I debate both the opportunities and limitations of certification in building more effective engagement with consumers.
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As a visual guide to the important link of the various streams of literature and the flow of the following sections, I present Fig. 1 below. It illustrates the flow from trust formation to the concept of vulnerability explored through theories of *ontological security* and *coping*.

**Fig. 1 - Flow of literature analysis**

2.1. Sustainability in the Context of Wine

Knowledge of consumer engagement with sustainable wine and the associated literature is in a relatively nascent state but has seen a significant increase in attention since it first emerged around the new millennium. Indeed, before the year 2000, no academic
publication in a comprehensive Web of Science search was found to focus on consumer sentiment, awareness, attitudes or purchasing behaviour toward sustainable wine (including green, eco or organic). Within this emerging body of consumer behavior literature on certification of sustainable wine, trust formation becomes a central driver of consumer engagements and warrants closer analysis. Trust formation in certification is challenged by two phenomena emerging from the literature, which are the vague nature and formulation of sustainability as well as the overshadowing of related practices like organic production. These will be discussed briefly in the next section.

**Varying definitions of sustainability and problematic confusion with organic**

Mirroring broader challenges in defining sustainability and sustainable consumption (White, Habib and Hardisty, 2019), the wine literature too lacks a coherent sustainability definition. Rather, numerous and often abstract definitions manifest themselves both in the market and in the minds of consumers (Forbes et al., 2009; Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014; Schäufele and Hamm, 2017). Similarly, the literature demonstrates inconsistent application and interpretation of sustainability across studies. Even where the term ‘sustainable production’ is used explicitly, the focus is often skewed toward environmental aspects of sustainability - excluding social and governance aspects - (Sogari et al., 2015) or a narrower subset of sustainable productions and consumption, such as organic (Barber, Taylor and Strick, 2009; Kelley et al., 2019), which is problematic. In the context of sustainable certified wine, this nuance is important but perhaps overlooked or not sufficiently addressed in the literature (Mueller and Remaud, 2010; Ginon et al., 2014; Sogari et al., 2015; Waldrop, McCluskey and Mittelhammer, 2017; Kelley et al., 2019). Due to different (but at times overlapping) practices, organic and sustainable management systems and techniques may impact the product (both fruit and wine) differently (Szolnoki, 2013). As a result, sustainable versus organically produced and certified wine potentially elicits different consumer perceptions of intrinsic (e.g. health) or extrinsic (e.g. environmental, social) benefits (Sogari, Mora and
Menozzi, 2016) but in the absence of a distinction, they can appear synonymous to consumers, leading to added confusion in an already complex purchasing environment. Within this vague, vast and complex consumption space, reliance on heuristics and trust (Eberhart and Naderer, 2017; White, Habib and Hardisty, 2019) offer insights into consumers navigating this challenging consumption space.

**Knowledge and trust as important drivers for engagement**

The literature specifically acknowledges the relevance of trust in certification as an important driver for engagement with sustainability claims and resulting purchasing behaviour (Eden, Bear and Walker, 2008; Sønderskov and Daugbjerg, 2011; Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen, 2017). This need for trust is strongly driven by the fact that sustainable wine is effectively a credence good, one where consumers cannot directly verify specific attributes even after purchase (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). For these goods, in particular, and versus goods where a more direct and measurable result can be evaluated, effective knowledge and trust building is a critical element underpinning positive associations and engagement overall (Barber, Taylor and Strick, 2009; Ginon et al., 2014; D’Amico, Di Vita and Monaco, 2016). Trust also acts as a powerful mediator in reducing potential attitude-behaviour gaps (Taufique, Vocino and Polonsky, 2017), a broadly observed sustainable consumption phenomenon (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010) debated frequently in the context of sustainable wine purchase (Schäufele and Hamm, 2017).

While the extant literature points to the importance of trust in underpinning consumer action towards producer-driven sustainable certification, it generally falls short of explaining underlying constructs of trust (Bonn, Cronin and Cho, 2016). This insight is not unique to the wine literature. Tonkin et al. (2015), drawing insights from a systematic literature review of trust in sustainability labelling across a range of food categories, concluded that “the vast majority of research investigating trust in relation to food labelling is atheoretical” (p.334)
and “does not provide a comprehensive picture of how consumers form trust judgments around food labelling” (p. 331).

Thus, to gain a deeper understanding of consumer motivations to purchase and positively engage with sustainable certified wine, the following research question emerges:

**What constitutes the underlying drivers of trust and what role does trust play in consumer response and action towards sustainable certification schemes in the Australian wine industry?**

The vast literature on trust explored across multiple disciplines, in addition to exploring types of trust (Lewis and Weigert, 1985) and trust in different actors (Atkinson and Rosenthal, 2014), importantly draws our attention to understanding the complex underlying constructs of trust to provide rich and meaningful insights into drivers of consumer behavior and action (Hobbs and Goddard, 2015). To further dismantle the concept of trust, this next section looks at vulnerability as a critical construct of trust as well as ontological security to ultimately understand consumer coping responses.

2.2. Ontological Security and Coping underpinning Trust

**Trust, vulnerability and security**

Given the state of ecological flux humans currently find themselves in, it is perhaps no accident that vulnerability—considering it for a moment in a more macro-economic sense—is so predominately debated in the sustainability literature (Turner et al., 2003). Adger (2007) deliberating human security as a result of climate change, draws our attention to the complex cause and effects of vulnerability, describing it as “the state of susceptibility to harm
from exposure to stresses associated with environmental and social change and from the absence of capacity to adapt”.

In the context of sustainable consumption and certification, the willingness to be vulnerable is a recurring and critical theme in the trust literature as Rousseau et al. (Rousseau et al., 1998) point out through a cross-disciplinary review of trust (see also Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995). And yet, in this era of accelerated ecological and social change, the body of knowledge of trust in the area of consumer studies falls short of explaining how consumers navigate this state of vulnerability. Thus, consumer trust in the context of sustainability warrants a closer assessment. By drawing on Giddens’ (1991) concept of ontological security and theories of coping, we can develop a rich understanding of trust formation through overcoming vulnerability in sustainable consumption environments.

Ontological Security

Giddens’ (1991) work on ontological security, or security of the self, helps to clarify how consumer vulnerability is both accepted and overcome, resulting in positive trust formation. In Giddens’ view, consumers constantly form subjective views of themselves, and this enables and drives actions and choices. Importantly, the idea of self or identity in our post-industrial modern society is no longer a given based on perhaps race, class or geography, but a reflexive process shaped, in part by our daily routines, consumption choices and the influence of others. More than ever do people have the opportunity to forge this ‘self’, and yet, ontological security is an unconsciously-shaped emotional, rather than cognitive phenomenon (Mitzen, 2006). It is also a latent concept, one that consumers are not actively aware of unless it is threatened (Possamai-inesedy, 2002) occurring “when our cognitive-affective organization of the environment is ruptured” (Mitzen, 2006, p 348) through incidences or experiences which disturb consumers’ routines and security. Important for this study is our understanding of what determines this disruption of routines, including routines of consumption in an era of heightened sustainability awareness.
Disruption to routines and the impact on ontological security - loss and reconstruction - has been studied in the context of everyday consumption such as TV watching (Innes, 2017), stressful periods of drought (Phipps and Ozanne, 2017), natural disasters such as hurricane Katrina (Hawkins and Maurer, 2011) as well as in human connection to degrading natural environments (Askland and Bunn, 2018). Collectively these demonstrate not just the importance of attachment to intangibles such as routines and the lived experience of the environment (as opposed to attachment to physical items), but also that better understanding of people’s underlying need for ontological security can lead to more nuanced engagement with people and consumers. Hawkins (2011) points out the flaws of the post-hurricane Katrina victim treatment which “considers loss and grief in a multilevel contextual manner, but does not address the existential or intangible loss and grief of ontological security”.

Whilst people’s actions, experiences and routines are often unique to each person, when teeth are brushed or how coffee is prepared, there can be common meaning behind their enactment in the search for security within this vulnerability. Through the theoretical lens of coping, we are able to enrich our understanding of consumers as more active participants in managing this vulnerability, security and ultimately maneuvering into a position of trust and restored security.

**Coping**

Theories of coping essentially explain people’s responses to stress and can fundamentally enhance our understanding of consumer responses to the demands of complex and non-linear sustainable consumption.

The earliest theories of coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) lay the groundwork for our understanding of various coping strategies consumers employ to manage perceived...
episodes and levels of stress. These accounts, however, focusing largely on either cognitive or emotional coping, have been critiqued for lacking depth (Brough, O’Driscoll and Kalliath, 2005), and have since been extended to include broader and richer explanations of consumer coping (Mick and Fournier, 1998; Duhachek, 2005; Edwards, 2019).

And while the more recent stream of literature moves away from the dual taxonomy of problem (or cognitive) versus emotion-focused coping, it fails to perhaps fully capture the dynamic process of coping (Skinner, Biggs), the importance of emotion-focused coping (Carver, Scheier and Weintraub, 1989) and the active role consumers play in negotiation emotions (Valor, Antonetti and Carrero, 2018), and finally the social influences and components shaping coping strategies and responses (Hobfoll et al., 1994). Wilson and Darke (2012), point to the importance of the mundane, rather than profound threats, and to what extent those more inconspicuous and everyday impacts influence consumers’ coping responses.

Notwithstanding other rich theoretical frameworks assessing sustainable consumption, including social practice theory (Shove, 2010), nudge theory based in behavioural economics (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008), there is a noticeable silence on coping in the consumer behavior theory relating to sustainable consumption. There has, however, been a flurry of research in the fields of sociology and psychology concerning coping and climate change (van Zomeren, Spears and Leach, 2010; Ojala, 2013; Boykoff and Osnes, 2019). This research points to the importance of understanding humans’ and therefore consumers’ capacity to adapt to and respond to their lived experiences of environmental change and should not be overlooked in the consumer behaviour literature.

Turning to my empirical research, a more in-depth look at vulnerabilities and associated coping mechanisms can provide richer insights into consumer engagement with sustainable consumption, build on the theoretical backgrounds discussed above and answer the call for more research on attitude formation, emotions and information processing (Trudel, 2018).
3. METHODOLOGY

Given the nascent state of the existing consumer behaviour literature in the aforementioned contexts, a qualitative, inductive approach was taken. Giddens (1991) points the importance of individuals’ carefully narrated and constructed stories to explain their construction of self-identity. This inductive approach allowed the exploration of these stories to uncover deep meaning and understanding of enablers and barriers to sustainable consumption.

Further, existing consumer literature reviews in the context of wine sustainability certification identify a significant skew toward quantitative research studies, many of which cite attitude-behaviour gaps as opportunities for future research but often fall short of explaining the deep underlying forces that shape attitudes (Schaufele, 2017). Edmondson and McManus’ (2007) analysis of methodological fit suggests where the theoretical state of the literature is emerging, with few firmly explored and tested constructs and connections, an explorative qualitative approach is an appropriate data collection approach. This approach also answers recent calls for more qualitative methodologies to better understand long term behaviour change (Eawar et al, 2017).

3.1 Data Sources and Collection

I conducted in-depth semi-structured consumer interviews, supported with additional data collection in the form of detailed field notes and photo-elicitation techniques during the interviews.

Participants were recruited through advertisement in the University of Melbourne staff newsletter, convenience and snowballing sampling (Patton, 2002). A purposive sampling approach (Yin, 2009) was employed to understand attitudes of wine consumers (of legal drinking age) with self-stated pro-environmental attitudes and where these consumers were responsible for at least half of the wine and produce purchasing decisions in the household.
Given the limited knowledge of underlying attitudes toward trust in sustainability certification, data collection started with a more positively predisposed group of consumers. In the literature these are identified as affluent, urban consumers (Pomarici, Amato and Vecchio, 2016).

A total of 12 one-on-one interviews, and one friendship group interview including 7 participants, between 50-70 minutes in duration, were undertaken between June and September 2019 in Melbourne, Australia. To initially understand extreme cases and a spectrum of perceptions and attitudes, the first five interviews included one participant with relatively low pro-environmental attitudes toward produce consumption and one extremely committed pro-environmental consumer (Locke, 2001). See table 1 for participant details.

Interviews were concluded when data and theoretical saturation was be achieved, which Glaser and Straus (1967) describe as a point where “no additional data are being found whereby the (researcher) can develop properties of the category” (p.65). Data saturation occurred after 7-8 interviews, a point where no new major concepts emerged. The interview schedule was adjusted during the last round of interviews to become increasingly theoretically focused - both emerging from the research and existing literature. As social interactions, perceptions and pressures emerged as an important construct, a friendship group interview was included in the data gathering to further understand how attitudes and perceptions are shaped through social interaction. Recognising the importance of social interaction and drivers, I also shifted from a post-positivist to a more constructivist epistemological stance, acknowledging the importance of careful social constructs in attaching meaning to individuals’ attitudes (Charmaz, 2008).

Interviews were held in participants’ homes, local cafes of the respondents’ choice (private tables where participants felt free to speak honestly) and the researcher’s home (in the case of the friendship group) to create a relaxed and engaging atmosphere that allowed the interviewer and participants to build rapport and trust through a more casual interaction in
a social consumption environment. The semi-structured nature of the interviews, starting with grand tour consumption and sustainability questions, allowed for a fluid exploration of consumers’ understanding of, and attitudes toward sustainable consumption and to follow consumer narratives where they provided varying explanations of the phenomenon of selective sustainable consumption and reliance on certification. Critical incident techniques, to elicit extreme positive and negative experiences, were used to generate in-depth, realistic and truthful recollections and insights (e.g. “tell me about the last time…”, explain your best/worst consumption experience”). In 6 interviews, photo-elicitation techniques were used to further draw out consumer attitudes toward sustainability to move from functional to more emotive descriptions where it was felt that responses needed to be enriched through another discussion method because the participants appeared to be holding back about their views around sustainable consumption.

Overall, participants were surprisingly open in expressing their positive and negative views of their sustainable consumption habits and attitudes via responses to direct questioning, and it was felt that social desirability bias, regularly observed in sustainable food consumption research (Cerri, Thøgersen and Testa, 2019) was not obviously present. The very concept of social desirability bias was at times openly discussed by participants when they discussed deeply meaningful or what they perceived to be controversial attitudes and practices (e.g. ‘oh god, I can’t believe I am saying this’ - Jamie, ‘I hope you don’t think lesser of me’ - David).

Additionally, the researcher recorded detailed field notes during and after each interview as well as during more informal discussions with consumers in daily life around their attitudes towards sustainable certified produce and wine.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Household structure</th>
<th>Level of sustainability engagement (observed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Hospitality Manager</td>
<td>couple, children</td>
<td>medium-high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Strategy consultant</td>
<td>single, young children</td>
<td>medium-high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>couple</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>couple</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>couple</td>
<td>medium-high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Retired tradesman</td>
<td>couple</td>
<td>medium-low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>couple</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>couple</td>
<td>medium-low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Relationship Manager</td>
<td>couple, children</td>
<td>medium-high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>couple</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>couple</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship group participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Business Owner</td>
<td>couple, young children</td>
<td>medium-high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>PR Consultant</td>
<td>couple, young children</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camilla</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>couple, young children</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td>couple, young children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Operations Manager</td>
<td>couple, young children</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Strategy Manager</td>
<td>couple, young children</td>
<td>medium-low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>couple, young children</td>
<td>medium-high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Individual and friendship group participants, all Melbourne metro based

3.2. Data Analysis

To remain open and fluid in the discovery of emerging concepts and constructs, and given the nascent state of the literature, grounded theory methods fit well with data analysis (Goulding, 1998). The approach allows for adapting questions and emergent methods, to oscillate between building and testing theory, both emerging and existing (Strauss and
In order to meaningfully and procedurally abstract the data from emic and very close to the participant to etic and theoretically valid, the data analysis followed Gioia, Corbin and Hamilton’s (2013) method of abstracting themes and theoretical dimensions. The following steps were followed in the data analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Transcription &amp; coding</strong></td>
<td>Transcribed and coded in <em>QSR Nvivo 12.0</em> within one week of interview, close to participants’ terms, capturing examples of daily practices, emergence of 89 micro codes (<em>Nvivo</em> nodes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Macro coding - inductive</strong></td>
<td>Matching of similar and recurring ideas or descriptions across one or more codes. 15 second order themes were derived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Aggregate dimensions</strong></td>
<td>Further analysis of second order themes, comparison with field notes, these themes were grouped into aggregate dimensions according to where they collectively helped derive theory and underpinned theoretical constructs. 5 aggregate dimensions emerged from the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Deductive testing – own data</strong></td>
<td>Aggregate dimensions deductively tested again against my data to develop relationships and understand a) where tensions exist in the dimensions and b) how they support one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Deductive testing – literature</strong></td>
<td>Literature was re-assessed for similar theoretical constructs to test as well as challenge the emerging constructs and relationships. Looked for existing theory to help explain my findings, to understand how and where existing theory may fall short in explaining my theoretical constructs and relationships and where it may contradict or challenge my findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Abductive testing – final abstracts</strong></td>
<td>Data was re-analysed relative to my own and literature-based theoretical constructs to a) abductively test the robustness of my own findings and b) deductively test existing and related theory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3. Clustering and Abstracting the Data

The bringing together of a complex concept such as sustainability with hedonic wine consumption delivered rich and nuanced insights into consumer attitudes. Consumers describe their daily engagement with sustainable consumption in intricate detail from electricity and food consumption in the home to fashion, waste, dining out and travel. From this rich empirical data, and through similarity clustering and abstracting of the micro codes and first order concepts, I developed the data structure shown in Fig. 2, including 12 second order themes, aggregated into 5 theoretical dimensions which collectively explain the inherent sustainable consumption drivers. The following findings section is organised by (a) descriptions of the aggregate dimensions, clustered together where they belong to spectrums of a dimension, as well as (b) the resulting theoretical model which illustrates the dynamic relationship of these dimensions.
Fig. 2 - Data structure
4. FINDINGS

Sustainability and sustainable consumption in many ways is a wicked problem for various actors governing the food system but also very clearly for the participants in this study. These participants consistently recognise the multiple root causes of their unsustainable consumption and are unclear about specific solutions, and the role they themselves can, do and are willing to play in contributing to solving these issues. They deconstruct and simplify sustainability in their daily practice- such as re-using shopping bags, minimising plastic use and food waste, shopping for free-range eggs and debate how certification can selectively aid them in their decision making. Yet, they are also acutely aware that they are being challenged to holistically consider the depth and breadth of their sustainable consumption – often to a distressing and overwhelming point. Ava, a participant in the friendship group interview, reflects on this complexity with her peers about the highly politicised topic of waste:

“It’s a constant struggle as to what am I doing? Am I doing it good enough? Have I just made a mistake here? Am I recycling correctly? I spend half an hour on Google trying to find it, I’m still not really sure if I have put it in the right bin or taken it to the right place. And I just always feel guilty.”

Just as Ava expresses a strong emotional reaction to her sustainability practice challenges, so do participants respond and cope differently according to their own dynamic attitudes and needs. Sustainability is often described and acknowledged as being in a state of imbalance, whether through exogenous events or participants’ own actions. To cope with and process this imbalance, participants shift their attitudes and practices to find security in four states influenced by two what I refer to as enablers. Collectively, these have been derived from finding relationships and tensions between the aggregate dimensions identified in the data (shown in the data structure).
I introduce the theoretical model (see Fig. 3) at this point of the paper to provide a marker for the outline of the findings which is structured along the identified dimensions. The four identified states are (1) stability and (2) progress on one dimension, with (3) flexible/fluid association and (4) ‘untouchable’ spaces on the other. These states are underpinned by two enablers, allowing participants to solidify their position in this particular state or allow movement to another desired state. Finding security or movement in and between these states is enabled by (1) trust in emotive and functional competence key actors supporting sustainable consumption and (2) mediating social risk. The following sections will first describe each of the states and enablers and their relationships with each other. These primarily serve to understand consumers’ engagement with sustainability and trust building in the context of wine. In the discussion section, I will elaborate on the role of certification, both as an opportunity and a challenge in supporting consumer trust.

Fig. 3 –Simple theoretical model
4.1 States 1 & 2: Security through Regress and Progress

The participants’ responses to processing the demands and struggles of sustainable consumption move along a continuum from restorative to innovative spaces as they seek to position themselves in or between regressive and progressive states.

In wanting to balance their self-perceived high levels of consumption with their own and normative expectations of ‘doing better’, some participants recall and long for almost old-fashioned (regressive) practices, describing how life was simple and less complex, with consumption choices often limited to more sustainable practices. When considering the meaning of sustainability, some participants elaborately assemble childhood stories and consumption experiences which often figuratively transport them to these regressive states.

Alexa: "Weren't our grandparents amazing? Because when you look back at them, if we all kept living like them, we'd be alright. I know my grandparents were. Everything was made from scratch. They ate simply, they ate locally. You know, they went down to the butcher to buy their meat, not the bloody supermarket."

These participants then attempt to mimic elements of these practices, incorporating them into their daily consumption as progress from a current state of un-sustainability, with Alexa making her own cleaning products, Ben visiting local produce markets, and Sylvia dropping off her kitchen scraps at the neighbour for composting. This simplification of practices results in felt safety and security for these participants as they adapt routines which make them active actors (actually or metaphorically) in sustainable consumption and therefore giving them a sense of control. Marion expresses this as “doing my bit”, Leah as “easy to go back to what you know” and Steph as “common sense”. This feeling of security can also be internalised by observing and admiring the actions of others, arousing reflective
feelings of care and consideration. As in the above example of Lisa recalling her grandparents’ simpler shopping routines, Camilla reflects on the shift in agricultural and food distribution practices:

I like that the market is now again placing more value on smaller farms, and family-run farms, where it’s run by a certain number of individuals that work there, and live there, and love the animals there, and name the grapes, or name the pigs, and love what they do.

On the other hand, a sense of security can also be elicited by the participants through progressive innovation adoption, to evolve with the dynamic and ever-changing demands of sustainable consumption. This may be expressed through improving known practices such as consuming alternative meat (Jamie), reducing waste more innovatively (Camilla, Tim, Kiara), or adapting to and being in the know about sustainability and technology innovation. Sue, for example, mentions wanting to know more about carbon footprint from Italian leather boots to wine, John embraces the idea of unique serial number labelling giving more detail about the product source, and Trevor considers cradle to grave resource use of some products.

Security in these routines can sometimes expressed as strong emotional attachment and satisfaction to sustainable consumption, with Sue saying: “when I was in an environment where it wasn’t possible to be sustainable in a domestic way every day, I really missed it.”

4.2. States 3 & 4: Flexible and Fluid Association and Constructing Untouchable Categories

In making sense of their sustainable consumption attitudes and practices, most study participants oscillate between being more or less receptive to adapting to sustainable practice demands and offerings. Partly, this is shaped by their experience with existing
sustainability claims, certification and labelling, with many discussing mainstream but questionable animal welfare (e.g. free-range eggs) and health rating (e.g. health stars, heart smart) labelling. Kiara, for example, buys organic fruit and vegetables but questions free range labelling whilst being flexible in that she weighs off a number of attributes:

Do I buy something that is local? Do I buy something that's organic? Do I buy something that's fair trade? Do I buy something that has no packaging?" I feel like I'm always constantly weighing those things against each other and trying to think which one is more important.

Most participants admit bringing some level of naïve trust to sustainability claims. Ben, for example, says “I'm a bit of a lazy consumer in the sense that, I will default to the image or the branding of RSPCA”. Yet, when they explore these claims more deeply, they have little tolerance for superficial information, or in their words: “marketing scams” (Marion) and “buzzwords” (Jamie).

Where participants are receptive to integrating credible sustainability knowledge into their purchasing consideration, they do so by carefully balancing information based on both facts and stories, drawing one or the other, or both. Sue, a highly engaged and knowledgeable consumer regarding sustainability practices, demonstrates this varied information seeking-need when verifying sustainable production processes, first pointing to a need for factual information:

I'd be looking for some kind of Australian standard, and a serial number somewhere, and not just like a Heart Association green tick, red tick. I would want something with a bit more data behind that.

At the same time, Sue expresses her openness to another narrative focused more on vivid storytelling, tapping into her emotive sense-making need:
That would give me the warm feeling inside, that maybe the people that are making the wine have a lot more personally invested in making sure that the farm is run in an ethical and a sustainable way, rather than a farm that's a massive barn of a farm, with lots of underpaid immigrants, holiday, backpacker workers, sleeping in rows in sheds, being whipped, or underfed, or underpaid, to make the Fosters wine.

Critically, many participants demonstrate a desire to freely seek different types of information and therefore allow processing of information on their own terms through various channels, moving between facts and stories and associating and disassociating themselves with one or another more or less strongly. Jamie takes advice from her yoga teacher, friends as well as from a range of mobile apps, Marion is strongly influenced by her father’s wine choices but also local winery experiences, Victor values his sisters-in-law’s sustainable living advice but is equally interested in technical recycling practices.

Opposed to this fluid sense-making where the participants are open to exploring sustainable consumption, albeit on their terms, is a state where I observe them actively dissociating themselves entirely from sustainable consumption and associated advertising/packaging messaging. Here, they relinquish felt responsibility altogether. This abdicating of responsibility has both a passive and active component to it – passive in the sense that participants see themselves as consuming wine as bystanders within an innocent and unpoliticised, even romanticised environment, one that has traditionally caused no harm in minds of participants and therefore does not negatively project on their own consumption:

Tim: "And I don't know, but I suspect that wine production isn't the biggest culprit when it comes to emissions in the food sector. It doesn't feel like it has a big enough environmental cost to warrant the time taken to do that [search for sustainability information]".
Sarah: “Yeah, I wouldn't think of wine in the same way as palm oil. I mean, people have their weddings at vineyards, the idea of the farm that has almost its own mystery and whatever around it.”

Ben: “Why do I care that the grapes are organic, versus the chickens are caged. There's no real impact.”

In a more active sense, I observed participants such as Sylvia, Tim, Henry, Eliza, Alexa and Jamie also relinquishing responsibility to different extents by mediating any negative practices, employing a number of strategies, including giving themselves credits and debits for good and bad behaviour and utilising social license as a justification for not consuming in congruence with their own or an otherwise perceived accepted definition of sustainability. This is observed across various product categories and practices:

Sylvia: "But I'm very super conscious, that every time I get on a plane, and go away for a long holiday, that I'm using all that fuel and it's bad for the environment, and then I get over to Italy and I eat all their totally unmodified GM crops and I lose all that guilt completely,"

Tim: “It's easier to just go and buy things from a supermarket without thinking too much about where they're from. It's cheaper, it's more convenient. And everybody else is doing it, then it gives you the OK to do it too.”

At the extreme, Eliza, an otherwise moderately environmentally engaged consumer, illustrates her almost joyful acceptance of self-proclaimed hypocritical behaviour without seeing the desire to create change in this consumption context:
I'm the ultimate hypocrite because I always take my bags [to the supermarket], but then we have a second home. To which we drive to. Often with two cars. Sometimes every weekend.

While these participants express their consumption conflict and guilt, referring to this conflict as “double life” (Jamie), "contradictions in the way that I think" (Kiara), and “damned if we do, and damned if we don't” (Alexa), my observations are that in some contexts, these same participants are no longer looking to justify their behaviour or resolve any conflict or internal struggles. Here, these participants have fully acknowledged and made peace with these various deviant behaviours - behaviours which could be interpreted as being at odds with their otherwise pro-environmental consumption attitudes and practices. Together, this abdication of responsibility creates ‘untouchable’ areas of consumption which may range from specific products such as cherished consumption of Fois Gras, concurrently acknowledged by Jamie to be “the most unethical thing in the world” or practices such as flying or consuming wine:

Alexa: “I fly all the time. That's never going to stop. Never, ever. That's my thing. Travel excites me.”

Sarah: “I would rather die than stop drinking wine.”

These participants are intentionally establishing pockets of protected consumption and escapism. A lot is being asked of consumers, and it is perhaps the vastness, vagueness but felt importance of ‘sustainability’ which collectively trigger this emotional response in participants. It is the very thing we ask of consumers –to consume sustainably, with all its complexities – that can drive them away from sustainable consumption, sometimes in the most critical areas, where tokenism reigns (I always take my plastic bags) and fundamental change is neglected (I should change my power provider or eat more sustainably).
Thus far, the discussion of findings has illustrated how participants occupy these spaces of stability, progress, fluidity and ‘untouchable’ and has shown that they are either drawn more strongly to one or the other. However, participants can also oscillate between the two or move towards one or another, often across different consumption environments. Sue, for example, talks about simplifying practices like selling her car and using public transport and walking (regress) but also wanting to have detailed carbon footprint calculations (progress). Kiara shops locally and mends her clothes (regress) but is interested in alternative meats and vertical farming (progress). Alexa talks her interest in sustainability and learning more from people and other sources, buying local wine but French cheese (fluid associations) and on the other hand never ever giving up flying (untouchable).

Two abstracts that emerged from the data analysis are seen to be providing an overarching support mechanism for participants to either solidify their place in one of the states, move between them or progress to another desired state. These are mediating social risk and trust in emotive and functional competence.

4.3. Enabler 1: Mediating Social Risk

Wine consumption illustrates how sustainability considerations can add immense complexity and even barriers to hedonic and already complex purchase decisions which are further strongly shaped by social influences. No longer are participants deciding between a relatively homogenous product like apples or carrots for personal consumption. All interviewed participants have at some point shared or gifted a bottle of wine and been acutely aware of others’ impressions and how this practice reflects on their own social etiquette and position. John illustrates this when recalling purchasing wine to share with a friend:
I wouldn't pull out one of these [$10-15] bottles for him, you know. I always make sure I've got something special if he joins. I excuse myself for not, say taking a 30-dollar bottle rather than a 50-dollar bottle.

This dilemma of wanting to please others and be seen as acting socially appropriately is compounded when participants take sustainability elements into consideration. In essence, a relatively new concept like sustainable wine is seen to be adding risk to the practice of purchasing what is considered socially acceptable wine. Take Alice, for example, who reflects on the social pressures in bringing an organic wine to a dinner of a mixed group of acquaintances:

But then when I handed it over, I felt really a bit embarrassed, because it wasn't a recognised brand. It was a bit unknown. I felt like it was almost like, are they going to be judgmental because I brought this bottle of wine that no one knows anything about it?

On one hand, then we can see that participants are seeking to gain the approval of others regarding sustainable consumption, on the other hand, some participants are also looking to covertly use elements of sustainability to communicate a broader sustainable consumption message, mediating social risk by proactively educating others. In this instance Tim, for example, a committed carbon-neutral wine purchaser, becomes the giver rather than a taker of information:

I like being able to go to somebody's house and being able to take that because I can point it out when I'm giving it to them. It's a bit of a conversation starter. I usually use that as a way to start a conversation about climate change without talking about what I'm doing or making it about me.
Others like Sue are persuading others by soliciting the help of “other like-minded people and suggest, Here's a batch of Keep Cups that we've bought for the department, let's lead by example”

Even in this situation, participants are extremely conscious of the impression they make on those around them, still a fragile state, constantly conscious to succumbing to social pressures and judgments, as Tim points out: “and they go and they taste it again like, "does it taste shitter now that I know that?”. Or Sue saying “I do it in a language that they can understand and I still dress like the corporate women”, expressing her need to fit in.

This perceived social pressure is perhaps brought on through a perception that sustainability is almost at odds with some products, particularly long-established practices such as wine-making which are deeply engrained in the fabric of consumption. Sarah ponders the trend for more natural production methods in wine and asks “Why would wine not be vegan”, and David says: “you just assume that a vineyard producing wine is doing it in a sustainable way. Does that say I'm odd? Cause it's something that's been done for hundreds of years, you know, 2000 years ago the Romans were doing it.”

As a result, known sustainability practices such as organic production are questioned as not fitting with expected product norms as Alexa illustrates:

The wine maker was probably coming from the organic place, rather than the wine making place. If you start off with the, "I'm really interested in organics and I'm going to make wine," you perhaps don't know how to make wine, and you can produce a really shitty product.

Just as participants express the need to freely make sense of sustainability through various channels as discussed, they also need to be able to point out or downplay sustainability credentials here to obtain the right kind of social acceptance and support. In order to feel secure and be able to trust certification, therefore, it needs to allow them to
appropriately match the social situation. The friendship group deeply debated the idea of being in the know without sustainability being too much of overt message, pointing to the need for sustainability to be “the PS, and not the main event” (Alice), raising ideas such as wine producers covertly communicating sustainability by “doing a guerilla campaign where they just start introducing the green stripe and then people wonder what the green stripe is and then because wine is highly social, people will talk about it.” (Leah)

4.4. Enabler 2: Trust in Emotive and Functional Competence

Participants are seeking support to ultimately diminish their own responsibility to constantly make choices leading to more sustainable consumption practices, as they see this responsibility as hard work to the point where they feel helpless at times as individual consumers. As Sarah points out, “I feel bad, because I know that actually, we need change to happen. It's in a much, much higher level than anything that I do, really. It's like, a needle in a haystack”. Others express this as “I can't save the world single-handedly.” (Sue), or in response to feeling the need to permanently assess sustainability credentials “as consumers, we would end up in, kind of a black hole” (Marion).

As sustainability is, at times, perceived to be a rather abstract and flexible concept, participants lean on and trust those institutions or organisations most, whom they perceive to be both emotively and functionally competent, in other words, those that have both a perceived motivation or want (emotive competence) and ability (functional competence) to act according to participants’ needs. As Leah puts it, “it’s somebody doing the hard work for you”. In this study, both of these trust elements have been observed to be closely positively and negatively linked to what participants describe as small or large operations, including wineries and retailers. When delving deeper into the importance of size, smaller operations are strongly associated with a greater caretaking and consideration ambition:
Henry: “I think with smaller producers...passion is more likely to play a stronger role and therefore the chances of them actually doing what they say is higher, but, whether that ends up being true all the time, who knows?”

Ben: “If somebody's doing it at a small batch, boutique niche sort of level, sort of an artisan level, they are more connected with the inputs and the end product, and care more about the process, and the impact on the land and the environment”

The majority of participants (including Tim, Sue, Jamie, Henry) feel more connected to a smaller operation, either through direct personal experience or engagement or because they can personally relate to what they refer to as something known or routine. In contrast, larger wineries are viewed as being driven by scale, efficiencies and profit, less focused on others and more focused on themselves. This felt closeness and intimacy associated with the idea of ‘small’ is often personified through key figures which are cited as trustworthy. These participants often recall visits to wineries and discussions with winemakers, detailed stories from boutique wine merchants or close relationships with produce distributors.

Sue: “Talking to people in the smaller wine shops that might have personal relationships with wine makers. ‘Oh, yeah, I do three months' work experience on that guy's winery every summer, and I can tell you he's alight.’”

David: “Rather than me going into a bottle shop and buying it, I think where the whole conversation can start really is, is from the wine maker themselves."

At the same time, tapping more into functional competence, participants strongly link smaller size operations with an ability to deliver sustainability practices, to have the competences and be agile and adaptive enough to deliver changing sustainability requirements. Both Jamie and Victor express their disbelief in a larger operation to have the capacity and capabilities to adapt sustainable practices:
Jamie: “I don’t imagine that it’s commercially viable for really large places to necessarily be, to just suddenly switch over into sustainable practices.”

Victor: “Some of these boutique wines that don’t export mass overseas, at least they can control what actually goes, where it actually goes if they want to get it back or what they do there.”

As a key figure of trust, the winemaker and the importance and validity of their voice is expressed over and over again throughout the interviews. Not only do they personalise and extend the experience of consumption (“we’ve talked to the wine maker and sort of feel connected to part of that story.” Sarah) but this perceived personal voice of the individual can help mediate distrust which is otherwise felt. Sylvia, who is highly suspicious of claims made by large operations, softens her position and opens up to trusting this large operation if she feels she could make a personal connection with the winemaker as they key figure of trust:

“If Penfolds told me, and I had no way of speaking to the Penfolds vigneron, I probably wouldn’t trust that story.”

5. DISCUSSION

Consumers are in many ways made to be central actors in enabling transitions to more sustainable consumption and production practices (Evans, Welch and Swaffield, 2017; Trudel, 2018) and this plays out critically in the global food system. Many of the food system’s most pressing issues dominating our environmental sustainability and public health debates are driven by increasing overconsumption of high environmental impact foods like
meat and dairy, high calorie intake, mounting food waste and developing nations’ dietary transitions mirroring those problematic diets of their developed counterparts. (Lang and Barling, 2013; Lang and Heasman, 2015). Given consumers and consumption are at the epicenter of this dilemma, how much can we expect of consumers as citizens of change? How do consumers respond to this offering of more sustainable consumption alternatives in their energy, clothing, transport and food choices, among others? How much can consumer education and choice through mechanisms like voluntary sustainability certification, drive behavioural change? Does it alienate or engage consumers? And, as Akenji (2014) proposes, are we making consumers the scapegoats of system-wide issues they are ill-equipped and incapable of solving? Or are they in fact capable of surprisingly resilient responses?

Theories of ontological security recognise this burden placed on consumers as a constant awareness of “chaos lurking” (Giddens, 1991, p. 36) behind even ordinary routines and at the same time acknowledging that more than ever do people have the opportunity but also the burden to shape the self through reflexive processes, consumptions, the building of associated constructs and the influence of others. Through observations of the present data, I see consumers echoing this chaos (often expressed as external and larger system influences which they cannot control) and their need to find balance through reflexive thought and action. Collectively this chaos and felt burden to be acting in line with one’s own and others’ expectations of sustainable consumption creates precisely the vulnerabilities pointed to in the trust literature (Boon and Holmes, 1991; Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995) and underlying insecurities drawn from ontological security.

But consumers are not merely innocent bystanders and victims of this complexity, waiting to be saved, but are actively shaping and taking control of their attitudes and practices to navigate this complexity (taking Tim, Alexa, and Jamie who talk about learning techniques from others, describing sustainable consumption as a growing process or slowing down and becoming more mindful in response to pressures and uncertainty). There is no doubt that
humans are navigating unchartered ecological territory but as others too have noted, consumers are resourceful in the most resilient of ways, finding hope even within utter uncertainty and hopelessness (St. James, Handelman and Taylor, 2011).

Within this complex system of uncertainty, the empirical analysis of this research illustrates how consumers respond to and manage the chaos, uncertainties and resulting state of vulnerability of sustainable consumption through reflexive processes that re-establish their ontological security. Collectively, the research makes four contributions to ontological security and coping theories and therefore the broader trust literature: 1. It maps consumers’ dynamic coping responses as called for in the coping literature (Skinner et al., 2003); 2. it extends our view of rational and emotional trust as underlying drivers of security; 3. it demonstrates new states of ontological security (as called for by Phipps and Ozanne (2017); and 4. it extends our view and definition of ‘disruption’ and associated consumer responses.

5.1. Contribution to theory

5.1.1. (1) & (2) Dynamic understanding of coping to find new states of ontological security and extending our view of emotional and rational trust drivers

Turning to each of these contributions (1), the model demonstrates how consumers return to security by recognising the dynamic, not linear or compartmentalised process of coping. My model offers both a deeper insight into dynamic consumer coping mechanisms as well as the fluid movement enabled through sustainability practices and attitude formations. By abstracting the regress-propress and fluid-untouchable continuums, the findings add a layer of relationship to these concepts, demonstrating that they are not simply opposing concepts but allow both anchoring as well as movement between these states. This oscillation, particularly regress-progress, is not a major thread in the literature but others have picked up tensions like past-future and their impacts on ontological security. (Areni, 2019) discusses
this in the context of social media use as “nostalgic yearnings for the past often reflect an unconscious desire to reacquaint with former selves”, whilst at same time attaching to the future self by digitising to achieve a sense of continuity into future and achieving a sense of immortality.

Beyond moving away from static or even linear explanation of coping (e.g. Duhachek, 2005) the model further suggests that the tensions are not antecedents or precursors as some others have suggested (Mick and Fournier, 1998; Moruzzi and Sirieix, 2015) but in themselves become a way of coping and a state of ontological security. In other words, mapping of these tensions illustrates the outcome of the coping strategy, not the input, and consumers find security in the coping process itself.

The enablers of mediating social risk and functional and emotive competence mirror rational/ cognitive and emotional trust identified in the literature (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). Through further analysis and aligning the model with this trust research, I group mediating social risk (a form of social trust) and emotional competence into ‘emotional trust’ and functional competence into ‘rational trust’. This analysis somewhat mirrors earlier findings showing that consumer belief in both competence and goodwill must be present for consumers to trust labelling schemes (Tonkin et al., 2016) but the present analysis further extends our understanding of the connection between rational and emotional trust (Johnson and Grayson, 2005) and importantly, its role in underpinning ontological security. The findings provide specific empirical evidence of the critical role of both of these trust drivers and further deconstructs these to enrich their meaning and applicability.
5.1.2. (2) & (3) Extending definitions of ‘disruption’ and extreme states of response – the untouchable space

Just as Wilson and Darke (2012) have pointed out, disruption of consumers’ ontological security can creep into the everyday lives of consumers, rather than through dramatic occurrences. This research, too, uncovers a creeping disruption rather than disruption through major events or shocks. Here, for all but the least sustainable consumption committed consumers, the mere awareness and knowledge of having to act in accordance with expected norms of sustainable consumption create a passive sense of anxiety and disruption. And even for those highly committed consumers (take Tim, Kiara, or Alice) who are actively managing and embracing sustainable consumption, disruption can come in the form of social desirability stress, illustrated by the fear of not being the odd one out, seen to be doing the right thing and acting in accordance with social norms. At the extreme end of this pressure created by sustainable consumption and associated disruption to ontological security, consumers find themselves seeking security in the untouchable space where they have potentially been alienated altogether from sustainable consumption efforts.

It is why (explained above by extending our definition of disruption) and how (discussed below) these consumers withdraw from stress which adds to our knowledge on coping. This insight is related but distinct from a number of coping theories building on elements of denial and avoidance.

This untouchable space is related to but distinct from other theories explaining denial and avoidance and the idea of consumers ‘behaving badly’. These include neutralisation theories applied to consumer behavior (Chatzidakis, Hibbert and Smith, 2007; Gruber and Schlegelmilch, 2014; McDonald et al., 2015), where consumers are explaining away their deviant behaviour, and deradicalisation (Valor, Antonetti and Carrero, 2018), where consumers adjust and relax their rigid ‘being good’ attitudes to find congruence between attitudes and action.
This research extends these theories by illustrating how, in the untouchable space, consumers occupy a place of complete recognition and acceptance of their deviance, an innocent place of peaceful post-shame and guilt, having given themselves mental credits and debits for their behaviours. This is problematic in an area as incalculable (for the average consumer) as sustainability where, unlike more simplistic good-bad behaviours (e.g. dieting where calories can be counted or exercise where progress can be monitored) the mental constructs of what is deemed to be good versus bad behaviour can sway actions far away from those that are truly needed. Recall those consumers who will guilt-free offset flying with occasional dietary adjustments (Sylvia) or dual house ownership with reusable shopping bags (Eliza).

This notion of recognising the limits of the citizen consumer - consumers withdrawing when faced with some unsurmountable issues - is not surprising to some: Barr, Gilg and Shaw (2011), by drawing on ontological security theories, and arguing that fusing consumption and citizenship places greater emphasis on role of consumer, say: “the issue of climate change represents an independent and over-arching discursive conflict between new and embedded practices that challenges the ability of citizen-consumers to act as agents for change”.

Recognising consumers’ underlying need for ontological security and how they shape spaces of security, gives rise to opportunities to carefully engage consumers but also threatens to alienate them through communication of sustainable consumption and certification.

5.2. Contribution to certification literature

In this final section, let us look at the role of certification, presented in the extended model in Fig. 4. Having arrived at a deep understanding of trust building, we can use the rich contextual data to hypothesise the role of sustainability certification. In the context of the Australian domestic wine industry, sustainability certification has not been communicated
actively to consumers, so consumers are largely unaware of this certification and the discussion remains primarily at a hypothetical level at this point in time.

At a high level, for certification messages to be trusted, they naturally need to speak to the underlying ontological security needs of consumers. Specifically, this may include the following for the various states and enablers:

Regress - Progress continuum

Certification can add to a feeling of balance in communicating a form of regress to known states, the way things were and a form of natural balance through restoration and regeneration. From research on organic practices, we know that safety, harmony and stability (Aertsens et al., 2009) evoke a strong positive association with organic practices, not unlike the regress state. At the same time, certification can express itself more innovatively and progressively by more strongly communicating new ideas and practices, supporting innovation adoption, a concept covered in parts of the literature looking at consumer adoption of alternative production methods (Thøersen and Zhou, 2012).

Flexible - Untouchable continuum

Where consumers are open to flexible sustainability messaging, certification can add another avenue of sense-making, and add to the need for factual information. Previous research, whilst pointing to the strength of credible, third-party verification (Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen, 2017), also highlights the utmost importance of drawing on various sense-making channels, as simplistic reliance on third-party credibility runs the risk of disengaging consumers (Eden, Bear and Walker, 2008). Findings from this research point precisely to this very nuanced communication need, matched to brand and consumer needs, and allowing information gathering on consumers’ terms.
The untouchable space is complex and warrants further research to better understand the role of certification. It is unlikely that certification has a strong positive effect on consumer attitudes in this space. At best, as consumers are in a place of accepted deviance, they may be entirely immune to certification messaging. At worst, it may push them further into a closed space where they are being alienated from sustainability messaging altogether. It is worth noting, however, that consumers occupy this space not because of any absence of morals but as a coping response to the pressures of sustainable consumption. As will be noted regarding further research, it may like to explore the extent to which certain typologies stay anchored in this space or whether they can be supported to navigate out of this space and be more open and flexible in their sustainable consumption practices. The question therefore remains - to what extent are we engaging or alienating consumers?

Rational and Emotional trust

Particularly on the notion of distrust in size, when executed credibly, certification can mediate said consumer distrust. Research by Green, Allen and Peloza (2018) supports this, suggesting that despite underlying distrust in larger firms’ CSR activities, when these activities and messages are consistent and committed, consumers perceived them as credible and trustworthy. As we saw from the findings, certification can be an enabler or disruptor in certain consumption environments and across different consumers. Remembering Alexa who criticises some winemaking practices as “coming from the organic place, rather than the wine making place”, or Alice who subtly only wants to see certification as the “PS, and not the main event”. To what extent certification can act as a social risk reduction strategy depends on how it taps into the needs of consumers in each ontological state.
6. CONCLUSION

Enabling consumer behaviour change through a variety of mechanisms (voluntary, regulated or both) is a central debate in transitioning to more sustainable consumption and production practices in the food system, thereby reducing and minimising the impact on eroding earth’s natural resources.

The complex and hedonic consumption decision-making context of wine provided a fertile ground for data gathering and analysis and revealed consumers’ complex engagement with sustainable consumption. Through the theoretical lenses of ontological security and coping, drawing on grounded theory methods, this research has explored consumer trust building in certification schemes in the context of the Australian domestic wine industry and mapped a
novel theoretical model of consumer ontological security as a precursor for effective trust building. This model has relevance for both theorists and practitioners; however, further research could extend and build on the findings from this study in multiple ways: It could empirically test the theoretical model’s robustness across other product categories, particularly with a view to exploring to what extent there mere communication of sustainable consumption places consumers in a state of anxiety and ontological insecurity. New studies could explore the ‘untouchable’ space and explore whether certain typologies tend to be anchored in this space or whether it is a broadly applicable phenomenon. Studies could test the fluidity and movement across the states, particularly whether navigating consumers out of the ‘untouchable space’ (or avoid them entering this space) is possible and worth pursuing as an impactful sustainability strategy. This research, drawing on literature supporting this particular sampling strategy (Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014), was undertaken with urban, affluent Melbourne (Australia) participants. Broader consumer segments could form the basis for further research. Across all segments, the certification hypothesis presented in the extended model could be tested to understand, particularly for practitioners, how propositions resonate with and engage consumers. Finally, quantitative analysis could complement the findings to help refine opportunities, challenges and priorities for a range of actors governing agriculture and food systems.
7. REFERENCES


