

Face the Rising of Global Ethical Consumers, The Company's Challenges and Opportunities Facing Today

-- Take Amazon as an Example

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Abstract

This essay is based on the academic research conducted by Shaw, Carrington and Chatzidakis (2016)'s "social" direction among the four major research directions designed for consumer ethics. In response to their call for interdisciplinary research on consumer ethics, this essay combines consumer ethics and management knowledge to conduct interdisciplinary research on the current business situation. And then, this essay focuses on the phenomenon of "Global ethical consumers' rise" and analyze the current opportunities and challenges facing from the perspective of Amazon.com, Inc. Based on the combination of relevant academic literature, this essay provides management advice for related companies.

Keywords

Ethical Consumer; Ethical Consumerism; Business Management.

1. Introduction

This essay is based on the "social" direction among the four research directions designed by Shaw, Carrington and Chatzidakis(2016) for consumer ethics. In response to their call for interdisciplinary research on consumer ethics, this essay combines consumer ethics, modern business analysis, and management to conduct interdisciplinary research on the current business situation. Regarding content, this essay will focus on the issue of "the rise of global ethical consumers" and analyze the opportunities and challenges that Amazon is currently facing from the perspective of the enterprise (Amazon). And based on the results of the analysis, it provides suggestions for the operation of companies, including Amazon.

This essay discusses the following logical organization:



Figure 1. Logical order of this essay

As the figure1, the essay's next part is the background. It will analyze the current situation and research of global ethical consumers from a macro perspective and then introduce from a micro perspective what problems Amazon has encountered and what responses it has made. The second part is the challenge and opportunity. It will use ethics theory and business analysis to analyze the challenges and opportunities challenges currently encountered by

Amazon. The next part is the suggestion. This essay will combine marketing knowledge to provide strategies and tactics for Amazon and similar companies to face the rise of ethical consumers. Finally, this essay will use a summary table to summarize the full text.

2. Background (What is Happening Now)

This part will be divided into macro and micro perspectives to explain the current status of ethical consumers and companies.

2.1. Macro Perspective (The Situation of Ethical Consumers on a Global Scale)

The macro analysis will be divided into four parts according to the logical sequence of cause and effect: the ethical consumers' motivation, specific behaviour, influence, and the company's response.

2.1.1. The Ethical Consumers' Motivation

The motivation for consumers to have ethical inclinations and growth is very complicated. However, certain is that individual consumers' decisions are significant to the entire wave of consumer ethics (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). As for the source of motivation, this paper summarizes as follows:

Scholar	Analysis conclusion
Soper (2016)	Used "alternative hedonism" to explain why consumers still gradually embody ethical tendencies without traditional benefits
Wenell (2016)	Pointed out the correlation between religion and ethical consumption
Starr (2016)	Found through the supply and demand logic of economics that consumers' pursuit of a good sense of themselves and social recognition are the major factors that lead to ethical consumption
Newholm, Newholm and Shaw (2015)	Reviewed the history of ethical consumption and found the influence of geographical factors on consumption ethics.
Kleine (2016)	Proved the importance of space and time to the birth and dissemination of consumer ethics, and predicted that with the development of information technology such as the Internet, ethics consumption would be significantly affected.

Figure 2. Summary table of moral consumption theory

In general, globally, the widespread growth of ethical consumers is related to history, geography, culture, society, structure, institutions, and other factors (Shaw, Carrington and Chatzidakis, 2016).

2.1.2. Specific Behaviour

Boycott and buycott are methods commonly used by ethical consumers. As Dickinson and Hollander(1991), consumers tend to reflect their values and beliefs by buying and not buying. Based on this theory, this behaviour represents consumers' voting choices for companies (Shaw, Newholm and Dickinson, 2006), and these behaviours have achieved effective results (Figure 3).

Year	Boycott issue and outcome	Co-ordinating group
2004	Office depot concedes to recycled paper policy	Forest Ethics/Dogwood Alliance USA
2004	Price Waterhouse Coopers leaves Burma	Burma Campaign UK
2003	Focus DIY ceases sale of all pets	Animal Aid UK
2003	Kuoni stops selling tours to Burma	Burma Campaign UK
2003	Kookai Clothing pulls out of Burma	Burma Campaign UK
2003	Staples Office Supplies concedes to recycled paper campaign	Forest Ethics/Dogwood Alliance USA
2002	Premier Oil pulls out of Burma	Burma Campaign USA/UK
2002	Triumph pulls out of Burma	Burma campaign UK
2001	John Lewis ends employees' shooting trips	Animal Aid UK
2000	Mitsubishi makes concessions to rainforest campaigners	Rainforest Action Network USA

Figure 3. Some successful consumer boycott campaigns 2000-2004(Source: Harrison, Newholm and Shaw,2005)

But critically, many consumers hold some ethical attitudes, but they did not act accordingly (Bird and Hughes, 1997; Cowe and Williams, 2000). The neutralization and its model (Figure 4) explain the reason behind this phenomenon (Chatzidakis, Hibbert and Smith, 2007).

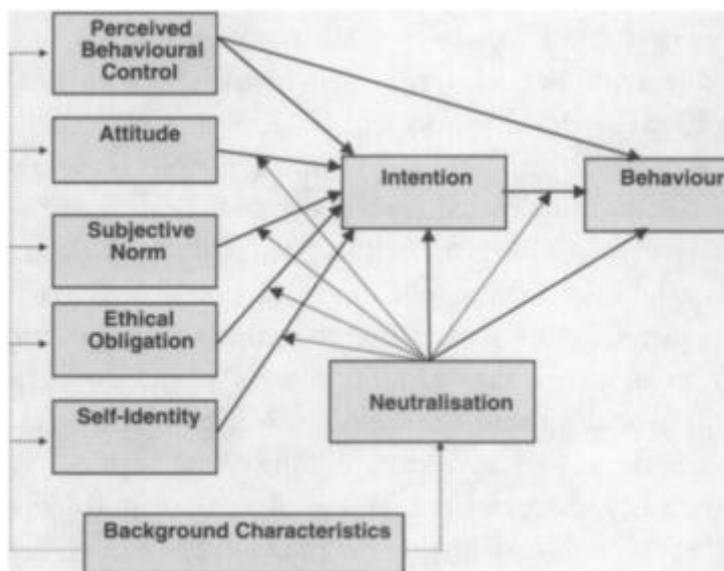


Figure 4. The direct and moderating effects of neutralization in the theory of planned behaviour (Source: Chatzidakis, Hibbert and Smith, 2007)

Based on this theory, Hassan, Shiu and Shaw (2016) conducted a quantitative analysis and the results are as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Intention	1.00						
2. Planning	0.66***	1.00					
3. Attitude	0.27***	0.24**	1.00				
4. Descriptive norm	0.25***	0.20**	-0.02	1.00			
5. Injunctive norm	0.10	0.11	0.11	0.26***	1.00		
6. PBC	0.45***	0.43***	-0.03	0.26***	0.14	1.00	
7. ABC	-0.06	-0.05	0.13	0.05	-0.04	0.20**	1.00
8. Behaviour (%)	0.26***	0.29***	0.00	0.02	-0.09	0.15*	0.18*

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 5. Correlations between variables used in OLS regression analysis for the stage 2 sample (Source: Hassan, Shiu and Shaw, 2016)

It can be seen from the data that the correlation between intention and behaviour is very low, which shows that there are significant challenges in converting intention into behaviour. Therefore, although ethical consumer behaviour is thriving globally, there are still many uncertainties in themselves.

2.1.3. Influence

According to the research of Clouder and Harrison (2005), the results of ethical consumer behaviour have direct consequences and secondary effects. The direct consequences of actions are often related to the target. For example, the HSBC Bank was boycotted because it has business with Elbit Systems, an Israeli weapon manufacturer involved in attacks on Palestinian civilians, and HSBC eventually divested its related businesses (Carlile, 2019). As for secondary effects, which is more extensive. According to the observation of Clouder and Harrison (2005), it will include the company's sector clean-ups, government concerns, and even some unexpected consequences, such as divestment. Finally, as a whole, the influence of ethical consumers is growing extensively. According to statistics, despite the British economic downturn in the past eight years, the total value of the ethical market has maintained rapid growth, from 47.2 billion pounds to 98 billion pounds (Cooperative-Bank, 2020). Therefore, it is dangerous for any company to underestimate or ignore the ethical consumer groups (Crane, 2005).

2.1.4. The Company's Response

With the rise of ethical consumers, many companies are facing increasing pressure on consumption ethics. They have realized that profit maximization is no longer the only focus of its attention and actively tries to change (Carrigan and Bosangit, 2016). The corporate social report is the primary means for companies to demonstrate corporate social responsibility. It is a report in which the company voluntarily displays its situation to meet the needs of ethical consumption (Purushothaman et al., 2000; Estes, 1976). But critically, the current report quality still lacks corresponding specifications, and some of the content is very controversial (Adams and Zutshi, 2005). In addition, environmental reports, declarations on the refusal of child labour, and the concept of ethical branding all reflect the efforts of companies to enhance their brand resistance. In general, companies has begun to focus on the importance of building an ethical image (Crane, 2005).

2.2. Micro Perspective (What Happened to Amazon and What did it do)

2.2.1. What Happened to Amazon?

In recent years, Amazon has been boycotted by ethical consumers due to tax avoidance, the environment, sweatshops, and even promotional activities during the COVID-19 period because the lockdown policy makes stores challenging to compete. Among them, the tax-avoidance boycott is the longest and the largest. Since 2012, Ethicalconsumer.org (2021) has

taken the lead in calling for large-scale and theoretically guided addresses for Amazon's tax avoidance, and it is continuing. It proves that the behaviour of ethical consumers can be organized and sustainable, and Amazon must pay attention to relevant demands. In addition, in France, because of the BlackFriday promotion activities during the COVID-19 period, consumers and merchants hold the boycott because they considered it is unfair competition for blocked stores, so Amazon had to delay the promotion activities under multiple pressures (Vidalon and Protard, 2020). It shows that the current business environment is sensitive, and Amazon needs to consider its business environment more carefully before implementing its strategy (Cherrier, 2005).

2.2.2. How did Amazon React

Although the ethical pressure on Amazon caused losses and increased investment in related fields, it also gave Amazon the impetus to reform and improve, allowing it to have more ways to consolidate the brand image.

In terms of specific behaviour, Amazon publishes CSR report every year. For example, Amazon (2020) report shows its measures and achievements in community, education, employee health, gender equality, and environmental protection in response to various concerns. In addition, Amazon's response to COVID-19 deserves attention. At the commercial level, it has created a relief fund and donated US\$25 million to help partners resist the negative impact of COVID-19 (Galetti, 2020). Amazon also supported the 'Right-Now-Needs' activity and donated food, daily necessities, and 10,000 tablets to students in education (Amazon, 2020). Meanwhile, Amazon allows all people who can work from home to telecommuting to ensure safety (Palmer, 2020). Judging from Amazon's social activities in response to COVID-19, Amazon already has a relatively mature social responsibility mechanism.

But in contrast, this essay also found that Amazon has used unethical methods to deal with related problems. For example, Amazon's warehouse in Pennsylvania was exposed that its workers were operating in sweatshops (Socialjusticebooks.org, 2021). But at present, it is difficult to search the news reports of the time on the whole network, and several news links also disappeared (Figure 6).

Amazon Employees Contend With 110 Degree Heat In Allentown, Penn. Warehouse: Report



Figure 6. Screenshot of the report on Amazon sweatshop
(The original report has been deleted)

In addition, Amazon has also been exposed by the media for creating fake accounts (@AmazonFC+name) on Twitter to praise its working environment and processes (BBC, 2021).

In general, Amazon already has a relatively mature approach to dealing with ethical consumers, but some of these approaches are not ethical and even legally controversial.

3. Challenges and Opportunities

3.1. Challenges

3.1.1. The Collective Actions of Ethical Consumers are Often Sudden and Unpredictable, Which will Harm the Company's Everyday Operations

As Hegarty (2016) argues, consumer ethics is complex and difficult to predict. Just as Amazon's BlackFriday promotion was boycotted, this collective behaviour is unpredictable for Amazon. From Amazon's perspective, they were only preparing according to the previous BlackFriday activities, but they were boycotted because consumers regarded them as "unfair competition based on the COVID-19 lockdown policy", and finally, Amazon had to announce a delay and bear the losses (Vidalon and Protard, 2020). Although Amazon's sales increased by 40%-50% due to the Covid-19, there is no doubt that similar actions will still disrupt Amazon's operations (Pinault, 2020). What's more, Amazon has enormous moral pressure in the environment, society, employees, and other areas because of its vast size. Therefore, it is difficult for Amazon to monitor all aspects and accurately predict and prepare for the upcoming boycott. In other words, Amazon will still bear considerable losses in the future due to the collective actions of these ethical consumers.

3.1.2. Brand Ethical Image has become a New Competition Track, Providing Opportunities for Competitors to Surpass

According to Syed, Muhammad and Nguyen (2017), ethical brands are very effective in maintaining reputation among consumers, so ethical factors have become one of the company's essential areas of competition. And because of Amazon's capital, technology and talent reserves, It has a tremendous competitive advantage in the world. However, as consumers pay more attention to consumption ethics, Amazon's advantages are being challenged in some areas of operation. For example, worldofbooks.com is a bookseller that collects and sells second-hand books, which is environmentally friendly and pays taxes to the British government legally (Long, 2020). Hence, British ethical consumers of Boycott Amazon deeply love it. Therefore, with the rise of ethical consumers, some competitors have threatened Amazon's competitive advantage by ethical branding.

3.2. Opportunities

3.2.1. The Attention of Ethical Consumers will Help the Company Improve its Existing Business and Broaden its Scope of Business

Consumers and companies are related to each other and create value together (Womack and Jones, 2015). And the essence of ethical consumption is that consumers are using behaviours to expose their ethical demand. It was difficult for companies to obtain effective consumer information in the past business environment and needed to investigate consumer preferences.

Therefore, for the current Amazon, the increase in the demands of ethical consumers is essentially an opportunity to understand users' demand and improve their own business. It saves the cost of company research and is conducive to improving the company's products and services.

In addition, other competing companies are not without ethical issues (such as employee treatment and human rights issues), but ignored by consumers because their business is small, so if Amazon can making improvements and enhancements based on existing opinions and pressures, which is essentially gain the competitive advantage over other competitors.

3.2.2. Public Opinion on Ethical Consumption can be Transformed into a Company's Prestige, Effectively Expanding its Reputation

The reason why ethical consumers resist the company is that the company cannot meet their ethical demands (Goodpaster, 2016). Therefore, as long as the company has enough capacity to meet or oversatisfied the public's demand, this attention will be transformed into praise for the company at the right time. For example, Environmental groups have condemned Amazon for selling Amazon-Web-Services(AWS) to the oil and gas industry to support increased exploration and drilling (Greenpeace.org, 2020). But when Bezos (Amazon CEO) repeatedly criticized the decision of the US to withdraw the Paris climate agreement and will donate 10 billion US dollars to save the earth's environment, consumers are less harsh on Amazon (Luscombe, 2020). Therefore, it can be seen that as long as Amazon can find ways to meet the demands of ethical consumers, it is also an opportunity for the company to promote. But objectively speaking, the funds and workforce required for such publicity are often huge. Moreover, the profit-to-loss ratio between the input and the output of the publicity is also complicated. Therefore, the company still needs to be cautious in making relevant decisions.

4. Suggestion

As mentioned in the previous essay, from the company's perspective, this essay believes that the company should treat consumers as co-creating value partners rather than troublemakers, and therefore should actively respond to the questions and actions of ethical consumers. On this basis, this essay recommends that companies adopt a thinking model ranging from strategy to tactics to formulate their attitude towards ethical consumers:

4.1. Strategy

Firstly, the company should evaluate the company's core business, core resources, and future development direction based on Porter's (1989) corporate strategy theory to determine the enterprise grand strategy.

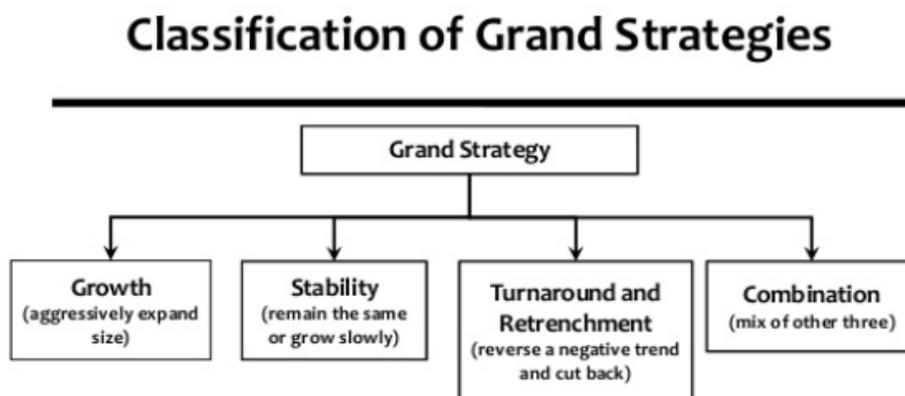


Figure 7. Classification of Grand Strategies(Source: Kalaskar,2017)

In the direction of the overall strategy, the company can use the model proposed by Crane (2005) to choose the appropriate ethical strategy for the company based on the importance of cost and ethics. In the direction of ethics, this essay recommends that smaller companies adopt offensive strategies that use the ethical niche strategy, and larger stable strategy companies adopt the mainstream ethical orientation strategy.

		Orientation	
		Low Cost	Differentiation
Broad		Cost leadership	Mainstream ethical orientation
Narrow		Cost focus	Ethical niche

Figure 8. Strategies: Ethical Market strategic model (Source: Crane, 2005)

4.2. Tactics

After deciding on the grand and ethical strategy, this essay provides the company with two tactics. Although these tactics are related to ethical strategies, they are not fixed. So the company can choose the degree and method of use by its operations and strategic conditions.

4.2.1. Monitoring Tactics

Like the encounter(2.2.1) and the first challenge of Amazon(3.1.1) mentioned above, the current ethical consumption environment is very sensitive, and the behaviour of ethical consumers is complicated and unpredictable. Therefore, the company should use monitoring tactic in strategy formulation and execution to ensure the execution effect of the company's activities. Specifically, it can be divided into three stages:

4.2.1.1 Evaluation during Decision-making

This essay recommends that companies introduce a risk-assessment matrix model for evaluation during Decision-marking. The company first needs to formulate the value of the risk that the new strategy can tolerate. Then in each strategy formulation process, this model needs to be used to evaluate whether the risk of the new decision is within the acceptable range of the company. Such analysis steps can help companies make more sound and effective decisions.

Weighting formula: XY+Y

		10	15	20	25	30
Y = Impact	Extreme / Catastrophic 5	8	12	16	20	24
	Major 4	6	9	12	15	18
	Moderate 3	4	6	8	10	12
	Minor 2	2	3	4	5	6
	Insignificant 1					
		1	2	3	4	5
		Remote	Unlikely	Possible	Probable	Highly probable

X = Likelihood

Figure 9. Risk-assessment matrix model

4.2.1.2 Pre-test before Executing

Decisions made only through internal discussion and analysis are still unreliable and may be interfered with by factors such as insufficient information or collective blindness. Therefore, this report recommends that companies conduct Pre-tests before implementing decisions and invite outsiders to evaluate the decisions. The specific method is consumer juries. It means invite consumers to show their thoughts on the company's decision.

And the company should formulate related questions and expected answer levels, and prepare the recommended action in advance. Figure 10 is an example:

Evaluation of the investment in the environmental foundation		
Indicator	Target	Recommended Action
Think that such an investment can improve his/her goodwill towards the company	≥80%	Modify the plan, add more items that can attract customers' goodwill.
Think this way of propaganda is creative	≥60%	Contact the agent to modify the plan and increase the unique design of the propaganda
Think this cooperation can truly improve the area's environment.	≥60%	Revise the budget plan to increase the donation ratio to the committee.
Think he/she will spend more on the company's product	≥20%	Modify the plan, add more parties that can attract customers to cooperate.

Figure 10. Sample of Pre-test before executing

4.2.1.3 Monitoring in Execution

Even though many decisions are complete in the thinking stage, many issues will still be encountered in the implementation process, so testing should be added in the implementation stage to ensure effectiveness. This essay suggests that companies use random questionnaires to check customers related to the decision during the execution of the decision to ensure the decision effect. Figure 11 is an example:

Monitoring in moral activities		
Indicator	Target	Recommended Action
Think this activity is not offensive	≥90%	Suspend the activity and re-discuss the feasibility of the plan
Think this activity can improve the company's ethical image	≥50%	Re-evaluate the details of the event and add more attractive factors
Think the publicity method of this event is effective	≥50%	Add more publicity channels to the event and add new supervision tests

Figure 11. Sample of monitoring in execution

4.2.2. PR Tactics

Just as the second challenge(3.1.2) and the two opportunities(3.2) mentioned above, ethical factors have become a new competition track and can also be transformed into the company's motivation and promotional materials.

Therefore, the company should implement PR and communication in this field actively. Specific directions include establishing communication channels and establishing relevant departments.

4.2.2.1 Increase Communication Channels

In an environment where ethics is becoming more and more important, companies need to establish communication mechanisms with customers to understand ethical customer demand and need to increase their influence among customer groups. Therefore, the company needs to set up platforms that can directly communicate with customers, such as opening an official account on Twitter or Facebook to listen to customers' opinions, hold seminars, and communicate with consumer representatives. In terms of influence and the CSR report and other methods widely used by the company, the company can also expand its influence by sponsoring ethical foundations, hiring ambassadors, and other publicity methods, which can effectively reduce the possibility of boycotts.

4.2.2.2 Establish Ethics Workgroup

This essay believes that the company should also prepare internally. Therefore, the company should set up a workgroup for ethical factor evaluation based on the existing public relations department. Its work aims to examine and evaluate the ethical factors of the company's business, understand the company's image of ethical consumers, and finally reach a goal that can predict and even resolve possible boycotts in advance.

Figure 12 is a logical display diagram of the suggestions:

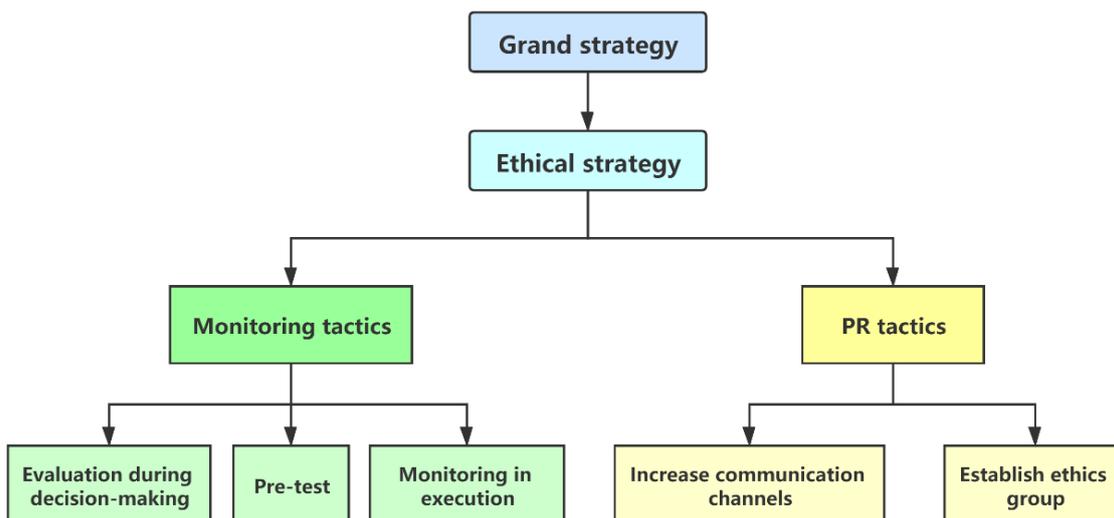


Figure 12. The logical structure of the suggestion

5. Conclusion

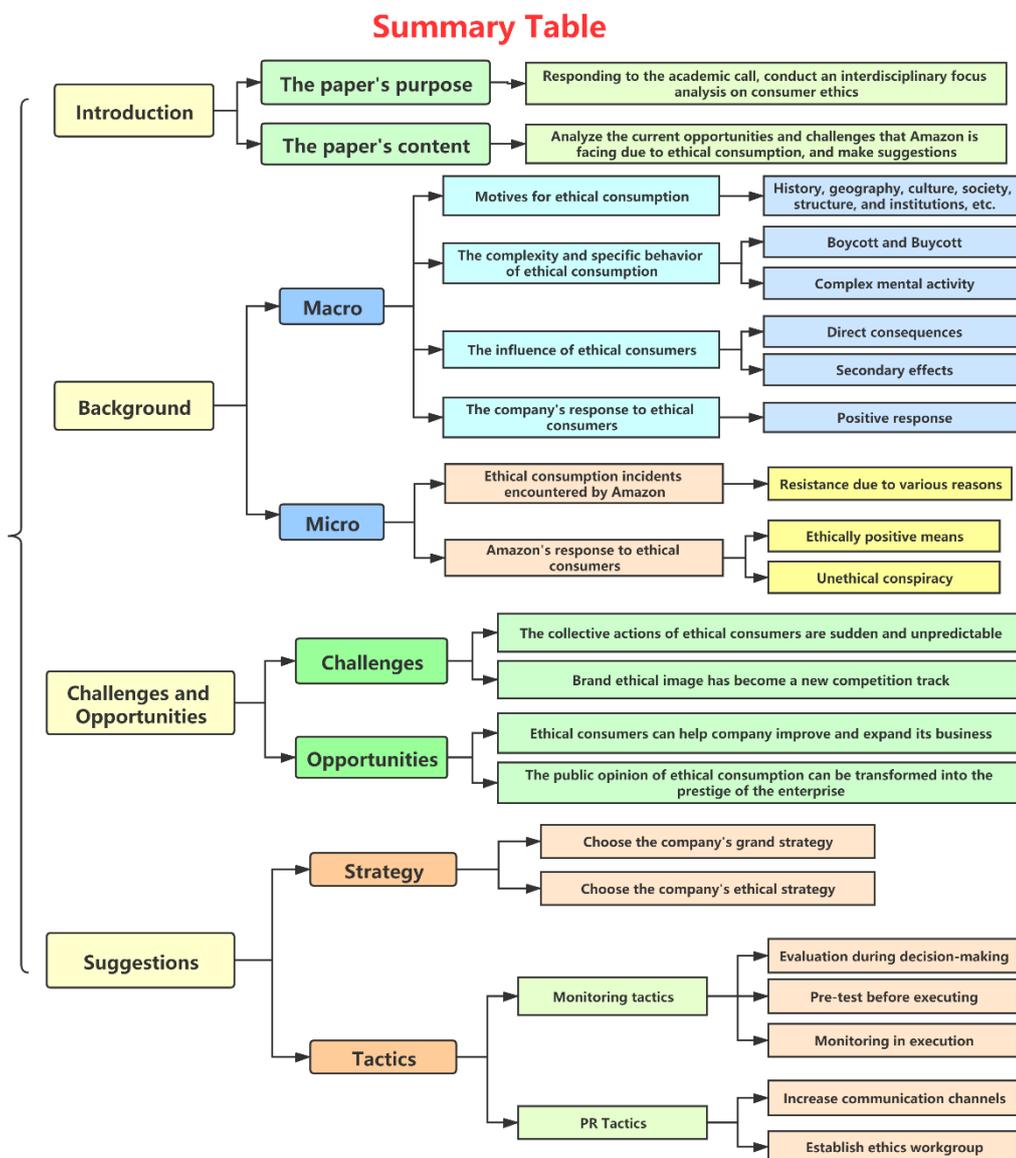


Figure 13. Summary Table

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