A belief in karma and its influences on marketing decisions:
Perceptions of marketing managers in a Western context

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Abstract

“What you put out comes back all the time, no matter what.”
(Oprah Winfrey)

This thesis explores the constitution of karmic beliefs that drive marketers’ ethical perceptions and behaviours. It hypothesises that a belief in karma might influence ethical decisions, and thus might help to inform the Hunt-Vitell theory of marketing ethics (henceforth the H-V model/theory). A better understanding of the influence of karmic beliefs on marketing decisions is important because it helps to increase the knowledge of how ethical dilemmas are navigated. This, in turn, contributes to making more ethical marketing decisions, which can bring both resource advantage for organisations and desirable outcomes for society. Since a belief in karma has been proven to influence the ethical behaviours of consumers and salespeople positively, it is assumed to influence the ethical decisions of marketing managers.

This study is exploratory and interpretative in nature. Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with marketing managers in New Zealand. The study reports the meaning of karma as perceived by marketing managers. It presents marketing managers’ perceptions of the differences in decisions made between karmic orientated and non-karmic oriented managers. Lastly, it examines how a belief in karma could inform the “belief system” construct of the H-V theory.

This study has been one of the first attempts to explore the influence of karmic beliefs on marketing managers’ decision-making. Previous studies have sought to explore the role of karma in influencing behaviours of consumers and salespeople, mainly from an Eastern religious perspective. This study contributes to the literature on ethical decision-making in marketing with evidence that a belief in karma is perceived to influence marketing managers’ decisions, at least in a Western context. It has shown that karmic orientated marketing managers potentially make decisions that are more ethical, customer focused, long-term oriented, and sustainable. Compared to non-karmic orientated marketers, karmic orientated managers tend to focus more on non-materialistic factors, such as relationships, social and cultural gains, and well-being. They are more likely to consider the benefits of wider stakeholders, including customers, society, and the planet.

From a theoretical perspective, this study postulates that the inclusion of karma as a belief system in the H-V model will help to extend understanding of ethical decision-making. Previous studies on the constitution of the belief system of the H-V model have incorporated beliefs such as machiavellianism; love of money; locus of control; and a just world belief. The present study has found that the way marketing managers perceive karma to operate affects their perceptions of various aspects of decision-making. These aspects can fit into the framework of the H-V theory, which helps understand how a karmic belief influences the decision-making process.

From a practitioner perspective, with evidence that karmic beliefs can contribute to more ethical and more sustainable marketing decisions, this study suggests organisations to consider designing and facilitating marketing management practices in line with karmic principles. This includes incorporating karmic principles into codes of conduct, vision and mission statements, and the recruitment and selection processes. This study also suggests companies to consider integrating karmic principles into their marketing campaigns to create sustainable outcomes for society, such as reducing materialism, correcting environmental infractions. This is hoped to contribute to the Responsible Consumption and Production Goal, one of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals that have been signed up to by many organisations.
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Aim of this thesis

Marketing ethics is an important topic for both academics and practitioners (Javalgi & La Toya, 2018; Nill & Schibrowsky, 2007; Schlegelmilch & Öberseder, 2010; Woodall, 2012). Ethical dilemmas are at the heart of marketing ethics; they are defined as situations where marketers must take actions that they do not feel ought to be done (Chonko & Hunt, 1985, 2000, 2018; Murphy, Lacziak, Bowie, & Klein, 2006). Dilemmas occur when marketers must compromise their values and/or beliefs to obtain and/or enhance profits for their organisations. They do not include illegal activities; rather, they are morally contentious activities (Laczniak, 2012). Existing literature generally agrees that marketing is the business function that faces the most ethical dilemmas (Anaza, Rutherford, Rollins, & Nickell, 2015; Dubinsky & Loken, 1989; Mascarenhas, 1995; Vanhamme, 2017). Studies have shown that between 65 and 75 percent of marketing managers face major ethical dilemmas in their career (Murphy et al., 2006). The purpose of this thesis is to increase understanding of ethical decision-making in marketing by examining the constitution of personal beliefs that drive marketers’ ethical perceptions and behaviours, and specifically the role that karma plays in this.

Generally, marketers have to select an ethical standard to make ethical decisions (Murphy et al., 2006). The traditional ethical standards, such as teleology and deontology, can provide some frameworks for ethical decision-making (Murphy et al., 2006). However, scholars have long debated the adequate application of these theories in a specific marketing situation (Chonko, 1995; Murphy et al., 2006). As such, many scholars have formulated theories that outline contributing factors to ethical marketing decisions (Murphy et al., 2006). Hunt and Vitell (1986, 1993, 2006) argue in their H-V theory that marketers engage in both teleological and deontological evaluation in their ethical decision-making process. The H-V theory is one of the most influential and extensively applied theories in marketing ethics (Ferrell, Crittenden, Ferrell, & Crittenden, 2013; Murphy et al., 2006; Smith, 2010; Smith & Murphy, 2012; Vanhamme, 2017).

The H-V theory postulates that marketers’ belief systems influence their ethical behaviours, because the way marketers believe the world works influences how they perceive the consequences of their behaviours and the probabilities of these consequences (Hunt & Vitell,
1986, 1993, 2006). This potentially relates to karma, a belief system representing individuals’ perception that a good (or bad) action will lead to a good (or bad) consequence at some future time (Allen et al., 2015; Converse, Risen, & Carter, 2012; Fusilier & Durlabhji, 2001; Reichenbach, 1988; White, Norenzayan, & Schaller, 2018). Moreover, because the karmic law is a causal law that is rooted in ethical consideration (Reichenbach, 1988), and a belief in karma is “centred on the expectation of ethical causation” (White et al., 2018, p. 1), it seems fair to suggest that a belief in karma might influence ethical behaviours.

In marketing, previous studies have reported the influence of karmic beliefs on consumer behaviours (e.g. Choudhury, 2014; Kopalle, Lehmann, & Farley, 2010; Kulow & Kramer, 2016; Mathras, Cohen, Mandel, & Mick, 2016; Pace, 2013). This literature has suggested that karmic beliefs positively influence consumers’ ethical decisions, in both Eastern and Western contexts. For example, karmic beliefs lead to prosocial behaviours (Kulow & Kramer, 2016), and result in sensible consumption acts and/or a reduction in materialism (Pace, 2013) amongst consumers. However, current research on the impact of karmic beliefs on the decision-making process of marketing managers is rare. From an Eastern religious perspective, conceptual studies have contended that karmic beliefs influence the ethical behaviours of salespeople (Singh & Singh, 2012) and inspire more socially responsible marketing (Low, 2013). Hence, previous research seems to support the assumption that a belief in karma might influence ethical decisions made by marketing managers; however, until now, this has not been empirically tested.

The core aim of this thesis is to explore the influence of a belief in karma on marketers’ ethical decision-making. Given the complexity of human characteristics, the influence of individual factors such as values and/or beliefs on the ethical decision-making continues being important research topics (Lehnert, Park, & Singh, 2015; Mumford, Helton, Decker, Connelly, & Van Doorn, 2003). Researching the influence of karmic beliefs on ethical marketing decisions is pertinent given emerging conversations about karma marketing, a notion of sustainable marketing (Laukaikul, 2015), and karma capitalism, the idea that companies should create value and social justice at the same time (Engardio & McGregor, 2006). These concepts are similar to the descriptions of the Responsible Consumption and Production Goal, one of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) that many organisations have signed up to (Tulder & Zanten, 2018).
1.2 Background to the research

1.2.1 Marketing and ethics

Probably the most commonly used definition of marketing is from Kotler (2017, p. 1): “Marketing is about identifying and meeting human and social needs. One of the shortest definitions of marketing is ‘meeting needs profitably’”. This definition suggests that the pressure to achieve profits might influence marketing to be “a largely sales-driven approach to the market; a focus on revenue maximized at all costs; and … a discipline committed to specious and illusory modes of practice” (Woodall, 2012, p. 174). This is where the question of the ethicality of marketing is raised. In another widely used definition of marketing given by the American Marketing Association (AMA), marketing is “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (AMA, 2013, p. 1). Accordingly, marketing should be considerate of the well-being of a wide range of stakeholders and should be “guided by ethical standards which would have the potential to change society for the better” (Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012, p. 288). These two definitions of marketing exemplify the dilemmas faced by marketers with regard to balancing the profits for their organisations and the well-being of their stakeholders. There is no doubt that marketing makes a significantly positive contribution in areas such as productivity and economic growth (Brenkert, 2008; Hunt, 2007). Nonetheless, marketers can produce both positive and negative outcomes for their stakeholders, including society and the environment. Indeed, effective marketing campaigns can result in negative outcomes, depending on the nature of the product that they promote or the consumer segment that they target. For instance, many marketing practices promote harmful products to vulnerable consumers; increase superficial and material desires; accrete wasteful materialistic lifestyles at the cost of meaningful alternatives; and elevate wasteful consumption cycles (Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015).

Ethical issues in marketing seem more prominent when marketing must evolve to continue “identifying and meeting human and social needs” (Kotler, 2017, p. 1), especially in a world where technological advancements are changing at a rapid pace (Roser & Ritchie, 2019) which leads to fast changing of consumer behaviours (Hart, 2017; Neuburger, 2018). These factors, together with increasing globalisation, heighten competition. This might increase tolerance of companies towards marketing activities with potentially negative ethical consequences to achieve financial benefits (Chonko & Hunt, 1985, 2018; Fry & Polonsky, 2004; Heath &
Chatzidakis, 2012; Pantelica, Sakalb, & Zehetner, 2016; Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015). As an example, to win more consumers and/or stop consumers switching to competitors, marketers are under constant pressure to innovate by developing, for instance, new products, new advertising campaigns, and even new unfulfilled needs (Cialdini, 2001; Kotler, 2010; Lindström, 2010). This potentially brings about marketing activities with questionable ethical content or impact. Some examples of this include new food products that have high taste appeal but low nutrition; and new packaging that is convenient for consumers but uses non-reusable materials, which lead to more solid waste disposal (Mahapatra & Kumar, 2009).

The questions of the ethicality of marketing are more critical with increasing moral demands from society towards marketing (Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015). For instance, consumers are becoming more appreciative of authentic products, favour legitimate treatment of natural resources, and desire healthier consumption (Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015). Therefore, understanding, recognising, and resolving ethical dilemmas is a critical dimension of marketing strategy (Murphy & Lacznia, 2012a).

1.2.2 Moral philosophy

Teleology and deontology are the most commonly used ethical standards in business ethics (Beauchamp, Bowie, & Arnold, 2009; Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 1989). Although they can provide some frameworks for ethical decision-making in marketing, applying them to a specific ethical marketing dilemma is difficult (Chonko, 1995; Murphy et al., 2006). This is because there are conflicts between teleological and deontological approaches. In the words of Schlenker and Forsyth (1977, p. 373): “The fundamental moral guide for the teleologist is the test of consequences, a consideration that the deontologist cannot abide”. For example, a marketing manager who adapts teleology will weigh the pros and cons of alternative marketing actions, perform a cost-benefit analysis, and choose the marketing action with the greatest profitability (Hoover & Pepper, 2015; Murphy et al., 2006). As such, from a teleological perspective, a marketing campaign resulting in plastic waste that ultimately harms the environment will still be implemented, if it brings profits for the company.

On the other hand, from a deontological perspective, a marketing decision is viewed as ethical (or unethical) based on the nature of goodness (or badness) of that decision, without taking into account the profits (or loss) brought by that marketing decision (Murphy et al., 2006). Accordingly, a marketing activity would be deontologically unethical if marketing managers
manipulate consumers to buy products (Laczniak & Murphy, 1993). Moreover, by asserting that a duty to others determines if an action is ethical, deontology acknowledges the morality of marketers when they act according to their duties (Chonko, 1995). Nonetheless, it does not indicate a clear way to resolve conflicting duties. For example, how marketers perform their professional duty to maximise the shareholders’ profits while fulfilling the moral obligation of concern for the customers’ welfare (Smith, 2001). Therefore, many scholars have investigated factors accounting for ethical marketing decisions and formulated models that outline these factors (Murphy et al., 2006). As we will see in section 2.2, teleology and deontology still have an important role in understanding these models, because marketing managers utilise one or more of these philosophies when making ethical decisions (Bass, Barnett, & Brown, 1999).

1.2.3 Factors contributing to ethical decision-making in marketing

Marketers’ perceptions influence how marketing decisions are made (Chonko, 1995; Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). For example, whether marketers should only be concerned about their own interests and do not need to worry about the impacts of their actions on others; or whether a marketing decision should focus on company profits or customers interests (Chonko, 1995). These factors are stipulated in the H-V theory. This theory states that marketers’ personal beliefs are among the factors that influence marketers’ ethical decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). The current study proposes that a belief in karma might influence how marketing managers make ethical decisions and might inform the “belief system” construct of the H-V model.

Karma is a belief system representing people’s perceptions of how current actions lead to future outcomes (Allen et al., 2015; Converse et al., 2012; Fusilier & Durlabhji, 2001; Reichenbach, 1988; White et al., 2018). The law of karma states that good (or bad) actions will lead to good (or bad) outcomes in the future, which will eventually affect the doers of the actions (Allen et al., 2015; Reichenbach, 1988). In everyday life, karma is a belief that the universe rewards people for doing good things and punishes them for doing bad things (Kulow & Kramer, 2016). A belief in karma is prevalent among the traditions of many Eastern religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism (White, Baimel, & Norenzayan, 2017; Young, Morris, Burrus, Krishnan, & Regmi, 2011). These religions are affiliated by approximately 25 percent of the world population (Pew Research Center, 2015). A belief in karma is also familiar in a nonreligious context, both in Eastern and Western cultures (Allen et al., 2015; Banerjee & Bloom, 2017). People with no religious affiliation account for about 13 percent of the global
population (Pew Research Center, 2015). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that at least a third of the world population is aware of the karma notion and may adhere to its principles.

The literature has suggested that consumers who strongly believe in karma are more long-term oriented, more responsible for their current behaviours, and more likely to behave ethically (Converse et al., 2012; Kopalle et al., 2010; Kulow & Kramer, 2016). A strong belief in karma makes responsibility for one’s behaviour in the present more prominent due to its impact in the future (Kopalle et al., 2010). Particularly, when examining a karma orientation of Indian salespeople through the lens of the H-V theory, Singh and Singh (2012) conceptually propose that karmic oriented salespeople would be more ethical in their work behaviours. As such, it is reasonable to assume that karmic oriented marketers might make decisions that are more ethical because they evaluate all the future consequences of their decisions instead of only focusing on instant benefits. This thesis will explore the influence that a belief in karma has on marketers’ ethical decision-making in a Western context.

1.3 Justification of the research

To the best knowledge of the researcher, this research is one of the first that explores the influence of karmic beliefs on marketers’ ethical decision-making in a Western context. This study attempts to respond to Singh and Singh (2012) who called for future research to test their conceptual propositions outside the sales context. A better understanding of the influence of karmic beliefs on marketers’ ethical decision-making would have implications for both marketing academics and practitioners because it helps to increase the knowledge of how ethical dilemmas are navigated. This, in turn, contributes to making more ethical marketing decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1993, 2006), which bring both resource advantage for companies and desirable outcomes for society (Ferrell et al., 2013).

From a theoretical perspective, the current research seeks to contribute to the literature on the H-V theory, a highly influential theory in marketing ethics developed by Hunt and Vitell (1986, 1993, 2006). This theory speculates that marketers’ personal values and/or beliefs influence their ethical decisions. However, it does not define these values and/or beliefs explicitly (Rallapalli, Vitell, & Szeinbach, 2000). Indeed, the authors of the H-V model urge researchers to explore many different values and/or beliefs, and the extent to which these factors affect ethical decision-making (Hunt & Vitell, 2006; Vitell & Hunt, 2015). Various scholars have empirically examined belief systems such as machiavellianism; locus of control (Hunt & Vitell,
1993, 2006); love of money (Singhapakdi, Vitell, Lee, Nisius, & Yu, 2013); and belief in a just world (Ashkanasy, Windsor, & Treviño, 2006; Bass et al., 1999; Bass & Tomkiewicz, 2002; Kulow & Kramer, 2016). A speculative reason why a karmic belief has not been explored through the lens of the H-V model could be because it is traditionally more prevalent in an Eastern context and the H-V theory was developed in a Western context. This study seeks to add karma into the “belief system” construct of this theory.

From a practitioner perspective, a better understanding of how karmic beliefs influence ethical marketing decisions might provide companies with the knowledge to design and facilitate marketing management practices in line with karmic principles to benefit both companies and society. The literature has suggested that karmic oriented individuals tend to show greater concern for the stakeholders and society (Singh & Singh, 2012). The literature also suggests that karmic principles have implications for a sustainable environment (Choudhury, 2014; Low, 2013). It is also known from the literature that the careful consideration of stakeholders and concern for environmental impact are among the key factors that elevate a sustainably superior positioning for companies, which contributes to more profits and competitive advantages for them (Kapitan, Kennedy, & Berth, 2019). Thus, integrating karmic principles into marketing practices is hoped to build stronger marketing positioning for companies.

At a more macro level, this study is hoped to help organisations shift towards social conscience marketing. This is because, at least in an Eastern religious context, a belief in karma motivates salespeople to be more ethical and customer oriented (Singh & Singh, 2012); and helps build better marketing, which is both socially responsible and promotes values for good living (Low, 2013). It also helps guide entrepreneurs to set decent business goals and profitability (Valliere, 2008), and elevate more sustainability-related organisational practices (Abeydeera, Kearins, & Tregidga, 2016). The marketing profession plays an important role in people’s lives and society (Brenkert, 2008; Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015). At the same time, there are various moral demands from consumers and society for marketing to change society for the better (Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012; Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015). Nonetheless, marketing has been portrayed as highly competitive, non-benevolent, manipulative, emphasising short-term financial gains, and primarily to create value for companies rather than for consumers (Chonko & Hunt, 1985, 2018; Fry & Polonsky, 2004; Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012; Pantelica et al., 2016). Perhaps thinking about karmic consequences would positively influence marketing managers’ ethical decisions, which would benefit society in the long term.
1.4 Research questions

The central question of this exploratory study is:

**How does a belief in karma influence ethical decision-making in marketing?**

The following subsidiary questions will guide the study:

i. What do marketing managers believe karma to entail?
ii. How do marketing managers perceive the difference in decisions made between managers who are karmic oriented compared to those who are not?
iii. How does a belief in karma inform the “belief system” construct of the H-V theory?

1.5 The research approaches

A qualitative phenomenological design was chosen for this research to maximise the opportunities to explore the common meaning of “what” is karma and “how” karmic beliefs influence marketing decisions, questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no survey (Creswell, 2013; O’Leary, 2004). Phenomenological research also helped gain a multi-perspective understanding of marketers’ perceptions of the roles that karmic beliefs play in decision-making, as the way that the marketing managers see and describe (Bevan, 2014). The data collection for this research was conducted through in-depth interviews with marketing managers from various industries in New Zealand. The research data was analysed by following the inductive-deductive logic process (Creswell, 2013) and the six-phase thematic analysis process as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

1.6 Outline of the thesis

The overall structure of this thesis takes the form of five chapters, following the recommendation from Perry (1998). The first chapter introduces an overview of the thesis, sets the scene for the research topic, provides the justification of the research, presents the research questions, and outlines a snapshot of the research methodology.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature that is pertinent to the research question. It begins with an overview of the literature on marketing ethics and ethical decision-making in marketing. This is followed by a review of moral philosophy, which leads to a discussion on
the H-V theory of marketing ethics. Thereafter, the concept of karma and its implication for marketing ethics are presented. This chapter ends with the research context of this thesis.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the methodology used for this study. It justifies the chosen paradigm, the research designs, and the research methods. It also describes the research procedure, including the sampling strategy, the data collection process and recording method, and the employed techniques to analyse and interpret the research data.

Chapter 4 reports the findings of the research, focusing on the key themes obtained from the thematic analysis of the interview data.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the research and links these findings to the reviewed literature. It also presents the implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, and the areas of further research. This chapter ends with a conclusion for the research.
2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

The evolution of modern marketing suggests that marketing needs to go beyond economic benefits for organisations to take into account the benefits of the wider community (Laczniak & Murphy, 2012). This requires marketers to take ethics more seriously in their decision-making process (Laczniak, 2012). This thesis argues that marketers’ karmic beliefs might influence their ethical decisions; the current study aims to explore this influence. To understand the interaction between marketers’ decision-making and their personal beliefs, this chapter reviews the literature that gives insights into the field of marketing ethics (section 2.1) and key concepts in moral philosophy (section 2.2). This review sets the foundation for an understanding of the H-V theory of marketing ethics (section 2.3). The chapter also discusses the literature on the notion of karma (section 2.4) and its implication in the marketing context (section 2.5). Lastly, the chapter presents a brief overview of the research context (section 2.6), and the synthesis of the literature review (section 2.7). Figure 1 shows the links between the main topics of the literature review.

Figure 1: Structure of the literature review
2.1 An overview of the marketing ethics literature

Ethical issues within marketing have existed since the inception of trade (Laczniak, 2012). With the growth of marketing, the field of marketing ethics has emerged to become an applied area with a highly important role in marketing (Ferrell et al., 2013; Murphy, 2010). Defined as “the systematic study of how moral standards are applied to marketing decisions, behaviours, and institutions” (Laczniak, 2012, p. 308), marketing ethics has been considered as a subfield of marketing (Murphy, 2010). It examines how moral issues are confronted by marketing professionals and companies, and how marketing managers decide which actions are morally right/good or wrong/bad (Murphy, 2002; Vanhamme, 2017). Many scholars view marketing ethics as a subfield of business ethics, which comprises the principles and standards that guide behaviours in business (Brinkmann, 2002; Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 1989; Vanhamme, 2017; Williams & Aitken, 2011). This thesis treats marketing ethics as a subfield under the umbrella of the marketing field, in accordance with Murphy’s (2010) view mentioned above. Thus, most literature used in this thesis is within the fields of marketing and marketing ethics, although in many cases it is impossible to effectively separate two fields of business ethics and marketing ethics because of the level of overlap between them (Vitell, 1999).

Marketing ethics has been a fertile research area for decades and the literature on it is still growing (Ferrell et al., 2013). The breadth and depth of the field has been expanded by an abundance of literature, which has been reviewed in several articles, such as those by Murphy and Laczniak (1981), Tsalikis and Fritzsche (1989), Nill and Schibrowsky (2007), Schlegelmilch and Öberseder (2010), and Javalgi and La Toya (2018). These review articles provide a systematic overview of research streams and/or topics within the field of marketing ethics over decades. While not a formal literature review of marketing ethics, the article by Smith and Murphy (2012) provides a comprehensive overview of the field, including its history, foundation, and a summary of the significant literature including influential theories in the field. A study into these articles provides a basis for the literature review of this section (2.1) and next sections (2.2 and 2.3).

2.1.1 Research streams and topics in marketing ethics literature

Generally, scholars share a similar view about ethical decision-making as one of the most important topics within marketing ethics literature (Javalgi & La Toya, 2018; Nill & Schibrowsky, 2007; Schlegelmilch & Öberseder, 2010). As an example, Schlegelmilch and...
Öberseder (2010) name corporate decision-making as the most impactful and/or important ethics-related topic in marketing. This is based on an analysis of 538 peer-reviewed articles published in 58 journals between 1960 and 2008; and based on both the number of papers focusing on an individual topic and the number of citations of papers on this topic. Sub-topics covered within corporate decision-making include, but are not limited to, matters such as ethical decision-making by companies, ethical values and behaviour of managers, marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Schlegelmilch & Öberseder, 2010).

The topic of ethical decision-making in marketing attracts research because “[e]thics is decision-making” (Chonko, 1995, p. x). Ethics is at the heart of marketing, concerning the decisions made by marketers to resolve dilemmas (Laczniak, 2012). When an organisation is involved in an unethical marketing campaign, each marketer in the organisation should be responsible for their conduct because individuals’ collective ethical standards make up the organisational standards (Chonko, 1995; Scharding, 2018; Woodall, 2012). In Woodall’s (2012, p. 176) words, “marketing is a function of the behaviour of marketers, especially of marketing managers”. Accordingly, the literature on the ethical decision-making process occupies a significant proportion of that on marketing ethics (Chonko, 1995). This thesis seeks to contribute to the literature on ethical decision-making in marketing by exploring the influence of marketers’ karmic beliefs on their decisions.

### 2.1.2 Ethical decisions in marketing

Ethical decision-making is a process that starts when marketers recognise a particular issue as having an ethical element (Bass & Tomkiewicz, 2002). Many theories of ethical decision-making in marketing acknowledge marketers’ personal characteristics as important elements that influence the decision-making process (Chonko, 1995). These personal characteristics vary. They might include but are not limited to: a person’s ethical sensitivity (Bartels, 1967; Jones, 1991); their knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985); an individual’s cognitive stage of moral development (Trevino, 1986); their religions, values, and beliefs (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006), and their strength of moral character (Williams & Murphy, 1990). In addition, marketing ethics theories typically discuss ethical issues confronting marketers in the context that ethical issues might negatively affect organisations (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Murphy (2010) points out that most of the developed marketing ethics theories are normative in nature, contributing to the marketing ethics literature in terms of ensuring marketers’ decisions would not create damage to the companies and their
shareholders. Although these normative marketing ethics theories are meritorious, their emphasis is on the non-maleficence aspect of marketing practice (Sirgy & Lee, 2008). While acknowledging the importance for marketers to ensure the benefits for everyone involved in their marketing decisions, normative theories of marketing ethics do not provide a clear guideline on how to do so. Nor do they describe the reality that marketers face when weighing the costs and benefits that their marketing decisions create for each of the involved stakeholders (Sirgy & Lee, 2008). These stakeholders include their companies, customers, employees, distributors, suppliers, the environment, wider society, and the marketers themselves. Accordingly, maximising benefits for all the stakeholders is impossible, which makes marketers vulnerable to ethical dilemmas (Laczniak & Murphy, 2012).

On the other hand, positive models in marketing ethics focus on the description of managerial actions when facing ethical situations (Ferrell et al., 2013). Studies by Ferrell et al. (2013) and Ferrell, Ferrell, and Sawayda (2015) provide a useful review of the positive ethical decision-making models in marketing. According to these scholars, the H-V theory by Hunt and Vitell (1986, 1993, 2006) is one of the most well-known positive frameworks in marketing ethics. They also posit that this framework helps set the stage for other ethical decision frameworks in organisational management, such as the person-situation interactionist model by Trevino (1986) and the issue-contingent model by Jones (1991). Similarly, other scholars have contended that the H-V theory has been the most widely cited and applied theory in marketing ethics, and has laid the foundation for the field (Murphy, 2010; Smith, 2010; Smith & Murphy, 2012; Vanhamme, 2017). This theory will be discussed in further details in later sections.

It is critical to investigate the ethical implications of marketing decisions. When judging whether a marketing decision is right or wrong, it is important to know which frameworks are used (Chonko, 1995). Since moral philosophies provide some frameworks for ethical decision-making in marketing (Murphy et al., 2006), it is essential to explore these philosophies.

2.2 Moral philosophy

The theoretical foundation of marketing ethics is viewed primarily from moral philosophy (Murphy, 2010), which is the "inquiry into theories of what is good and evil and into what is right and wrong, and thus is inquiry into what we ought and ought not to do" (Beauchamp & Bowie, 1983, p. 3). The most dominant moral philosophies applied in business ethics are teleology and deontology (Beauchamp et al., 2009; Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 1989). As briefly
mentioned in section 1.1.2, these theories provide useful frameworks for ethical decision-making in marketing, but they cannot completely guide marketers on what to do in every situation (Chonko, 1995; Murphy et al., 2006). An understanding of these theories assists in understanding the intersection of fundamental ethical frameworks in relation to marketing practices. It also helps us understand the H-V theory of marketing ethics, which will be presented in section 2.3.

### 2.2.1 Teleology

Also known as consequence-based theories, teleological approaches focus on the outcome of the action. This means that the morality of an action depends on the consequences produced by that action (Schlenker & Forsyth, 1977). Teleology only deals with the consequences of the behaviours or actions, and from a teleological view, decisions are based on anticipated rewards or punishments coming from the actions (Shanahan & Hyman, 2003). Unlike a karmic law which suggests a causal link between the original action and the subsequent outcome, teleology does not (Bronkhorst, 2000; Marques, 2012). From a teleological perspective, the result of the marketing decision matters. This means that a marketing decision is evaluated as good (or bad) depending on its good (or bad) profitability (Hoover & Pepper, 2015; Javalgi & La Toya, 2018; Murphy et al., 2006).

Teleologists determine the appropriateness of behaviour by examining the ratio of good-to-bad produced by that behaviour (Chonko, 1995). They are generally more pragmatic because they are willing to tolerate negative consequences to the extent that positive consequences outweigh negative ones (Schlenker & Forsyth, 1977). Teleological norms in marketing are things that marketers should (or should not) do because they will have desirable (or undesirable) consequences (Williams & Aitken, 2011).

Utilitarianism is the most commonly applied ethical theory in this teleological category because of its strong appeal of cost-benefit character (Murphy & Laczniak, 2012b). The utilitarianism approach to marketing suggests that a marketing decision is only chosen when that decision results in the greatest ratio of good-to-bad for the greatest number of individuals involved in that marketing decision (Hoover & Pepper, 2015; Javalgi & La Toya, 2018; Murphy & Laczniak, 2012b). Therefore, utilitarianism can relate to profit maximisation. Many marketing managers have used it as a framework for decision-making (Murphy & Laczniak, 2012b). Another characteristic of utilitarianism is that it recognises the interests of all stakeholders in a
marketing decision (Chonko, 1995). The good-to-bad ratio of a marketing decision will be applicable not only to the benefits of marketers’ organisations but also to each customer, supplier, wholesaler, retailer, and people involved in that decision. This feature is, on the other hand, a drawback of utilitarianism, because it is hard to decide whose perception of goodness the decision should be based on. That is, whether it is the customer, supplier, or wholesaler whose perception of goodness will prevail (Murphy et al., 2006). Another drawback of utilitarianism is its ignorance of the wrongness of the behaviour because it only focuses on the end results rather than the means and/or the intention to achieve the results (Murphy & Laczniak, 2012b).

2.2.2 Deontology

Deontological approaches, or duty-based theories, indicate that “actions are best judged as “good”, standing alone and without regard to the consequences” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 21). Fundamental rules and individuals’ obligations are the focus of the deontological principle, while the consequences of individuals’ actions may not require analysis (Schlenker & Forsyth, 1977). Accordingly, an action is considered ethical if it is correct in and of itself, and if it is based on rule or obligation (Laczniak & Murphy, 1993). A deontological norm refers to a pre-defined guideline that helps judge whether a behaviour is ethical or not (Javalgi & La Toya, 2018). If an action fails to meet the guideline, deontologists would reject it regardless of its outcomes (Schlenker & Forsyth, 1977). Moreover, from a deontological perspective, behaviour is judged as ethical or unethical based upon its motivation or intention (Hoover & Pepper, 2015; Javalgi & La Toya, 2018; Murphy et al., 2006).

Immanuel Kant is the most widely recognised philosopher within deontology. He “contended that moral laws took the form of categorical imperatives – principles that defined behaviours appropriate in all situations and that should be followed by all persons as a matter of duty” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 21). Interpreting Kant’s stance, a marketing activity is unethical if it gives consumers dishonest information to make them buy the product, or if it treats consumers as a means to achieve profitability rather than as ends to serve (Laczniak & Murphy, 1993).

An advantage of deontological theories is their implications for marketers when deciding a marketing activity. For instance, by asserting that actions are intrinsically right or wrong, Kant’s deontology provides an indication for marketers to eliminate dishonest approaches, which are always considered wrong (Chonko, 1995). Similarly, by asserting that duty to others
decides if an action is ethical or not, Kant’s philosophy acknowledges the morality of marketers when they act according to their duties. Since the law endorses some rights and responsibilities, marketers should consider these rights and responsibilities during the ethical decision-making process (Chonko, 1995). As maintained by Williams and Aitken (2011), deontological marketing norms include things that marketers should do for some duty reasons.

Kant’s deontology does not come without controversy. As asserted by Chonko (1995), Kant’s deontology does not indicate a clear way to resolve a conflict. For example, how marketers resolve conflicting duties owed to shareholders and consumers. Furthermore, Kant’s deontology states that duty is not based on the result or consequence, but rather on doing what is right. What if a marketer argues that telling the truth is right and as a result, they might share the marketing strategy of their company with the competitors when asked.

Taken together, moral philosophies have some important implications for marketing managers, but they conflict with each other, and therefore they complicate the decision-making process in many circumstances (Chonko, 1995). While there is an on-going debate about how these moral philosophies should be applied to a specific marketing situation (Chonko, 1995; Murphy et al., 2006), scholars have agreed that marketing managers utilise one or more of these philosophies when making ethical decisions (Bass et al., 1999). In their H-V theory, Hunt and Vitell (1986, 1993, 2006) propose that marketing managers make ethical judgments based on both teleological and deontological philosophy. The next section discusses this theory.

2.3 The H-V theory

As mentioned in section 2.1.2, the H-V theory is one of the most influential and extensively tested theories in marketing ethics and has been highly appraised by many scholars (Ferrell et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2006; Smith, 2010; Smith & Murphy, 2012; Vanhamme, 2017). For example, Smith (2010) and Vanhamme (2017) assert that the H-V model has laid the foundations for the field of marketing ethics. Ferrell et al. (2015) comment that this model helps marketing practitioners understand the cognitive processes related to individuals’ ethical perspectives. It recognises the value of stakeholders in the teleological evaluation (Ferrell et al., 2015). In addition, the literature has empirically found that this model is not only concerned with marketing ethics but also relevant to describe ethical attitudes and behaviours of human resource and finance managers (O’Higgins & Kelleher, 2005).
This theory has received some criticism. Laczniak and Murphy (1993, p. 48) comment that the “greatest short-coming of [this model] is that [it is] basically descriptive”. While the model explains the factors involved in an ethical decision-making process, it does not provide any moral judgment about the appropriateness of marketers’ decisions (Laczniak & Murphy, 1993). Responding to this criticism, the authors of the model highlight that “being descriptive is the theory’s purpose” (Hunt & Vitell, 2006, p. 149). Another criticism is from Ferrell et al. (2015) who question whether the H-V model could specify an ethical decision-making situation in an organisation. They maintain that the model is more of a theory of individual ethical decision-making due to its underutilisation of the organisational moderators (Ferrell et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the fact that the first and the third versions of H-V theory received 3,373 citations (results given by Google Scholar on 12th of August 2018; the citations for the second version cannot be tracked because it was published in a paper book) is an evidence of the widespread use of this theory. Before exploring the empirical literature that supports the H-V model (section 2.3.2), an overview of this theory will be presented (section 2.3.1).

2.3.1 An overview of the H-V theory

Overall, the H-V theory by Hunt and Vitell (1986, 1993, 2006) states that personal characteristics of marketing managers, together with their cultural, professional, industry and professional environments, influence their ethical decision-making process. These characteristics include marketers’ religion, value system, belief system, strength of moral character, cognitive moral development, and ethical sensitivity. Hunt and Vitell firstly presented this theory in 1986 as “a general theory of marketing ethics” to provide a theory of ethical decision-making in marketing to guide empirical research and analysis. They revised the model in 1993 and named the “Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics” after receiving feedback from other scholars that the model applied to ethical decision-making in general, not just to decision-making in marketing or business. In the updated version in 2006, Hunt and Vitell gave an overview of the 1993 revision and provided further understanding about the model. Figure 2 shows this theory as presented in the latest version, illustrating marketers’ process of making ethical judgments, intentions, and decisions/behaviours through a deontological and teleological evaluation when they face an ethical problem.

The H-V model postulates that belief systems guide marketers’ behaviours in ethical situations. Belief systems of marketers focus on their set of beliefs about the world (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). The H-V model argues that the way marketers believe how the world works
influences their ethical behaviours, by influencing the perceived consequences of the alternatives; the probabilities of consequences; the desirability of consequences; and the consideration of the stakeholders involved in their marketing decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). The core aim of this study is marketers’ belief systems. More specifically, it explores how marketers’ karmic beliefs influence their ethical decision-making process.

According to the H-V theory, marketers’ belief systems influence their deontological and teleological evaluation, ultimately influencing their ethical decisions. The deontological process involves marketers evaluating each ethical problem and its alternatives against predetermined deontological norms. These norms normally take the forms such as: “It is always right to...”; “it is generally or usually wrong to...” (Hunt & Vitell, 2006, p. 145). As Hunt and Vitell (1986, 1993, 2006) elaborated, these norms represent personal values or rules of moral behaviours. They include a range of general beliefs about things (for example, honesty, stealing, and cheating) and issue-specific beliefs about things (for example, deceptive advertising, product safety, and bribery).
The teleological evaluation process involves marketers focusing on: (i) the perceived consequences of each alternative for different stakeholders; (ii) the probability that each consequence will happen to each stakeholder; (iii) the desirability of each consequence; and (iv) the perceived importance of stakeholders involved. An overall result of this process is the relative goodness versus badness produced by each alternative, as perceived by the marketer. The H-V model posits that marketers combine the deontological and teleological evaluation to shape their ethical judgments, which in turn influence their intentions, and then their behaviours/decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006).

2.3.2 The empirical examination of the H-V model

There has been substantial research employing the H-V model as a theoretical framework for empirical investigation. This literature provides strong support for the H-V model, not only in marketing ethics but also in business ethics, including consumer ethics and sales ethics (Ferrell et al., 2013; McClaren, 2013; Smith & Murphy, 2012; Vanhamme, 2017). This section will cover representative empirical literature on the influence of marketing managers’ religions, values, and beliefs on their decisions. This review will show that karmic beliefs might drive ethical decisions in marketing.

2.3.2.1 The influence of marketer’s religions on ethical decision-making

The H-V model postulates that marketers’ religion influences their ethical decision-making (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). Although a belief in karma is independent of religion (Allen et al., 2015; Banerjee & Bloom, 2017), it is a central belief system in many Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism (White et al., 2018). However, from an Eastern religious perspective, there seems to be no literature on karmic belief systems in relation to marketing managers’ ethical decisions. The current literature, as we will see more in section 2.5.1, has confirmed the role of Hinduism and Buddhism in influencing ethical behaviours of managers and leaders in a general business and/or management context. This influence is partly because of a belief in karma, which is a key doctrine in Hinduism and Buddhism.

In a Western context, there has been empirical literature on the relationship between marketing managers’ religiosity and their ethical decision-making. For example, Singhapakdi, Marta, Rallapalli, and Rao (2000) have found that the religiosity of marketers has a significant positive impact on their moral philosophies, ethical perceptions, and ethical intentions, which ultimately
positively influence their ethical decisions. This finding was from a mail survey conducted with marketing professionals in America (Singhapakdi et al., 2000). Meanwhile, a relationship between individuals’ religiosity and their beliefs in karma has also been empirically investigated. For instance, in an online survey conducted with adults in America and Canada, White et al. (2018) found that a belief in karma is positively associated with religiosity. A combination of the findings from these studies triggers a question of the correlation between individuals’ beliefs in karma and ethical decisions. As we will see more in section 2.5.2.2, in a Western context, there is a positive link between consumers’ beliefs in karma and their pro-social behaviours (Kulow & Kramer, 2016). The link between marketing managers’ beliefs in karma and their ethical behaviours remains a gap in the current literature. This thesis attempts to address this gap.

It is worth noting that among the entire American and Canadian samples included in the study of White et al. (2018), the Christian groups accounted for 52.7 percent and 57.9 percent, respectively; the non-religious groups accounted for 38.9 percent and 30.7 percent respectively. This means that their samples were not subject to a bias to an Eastern religious perspective (White et al., 2018). In addition, the study of White et al. (2018) has suggested that individuals’ beliefs in karma cannot be predicted by their religiosity. This supports Allen et al. (2015) and Banerjee and Bloom (2017) who argue that a belief in karma is independent of religion.

2.3.2.2 The influence of marketer’s value systems on ethical decision-making

It is common to find values and beliefs being used interchangeably in the literature. This is understandable because beliefs shape values and hence they are antecedents of values (Mumford et al., 2003; Narasimhan, Bhaskar, & Prakhya, 2010). In an Eastern context such as India, karma is one of the most basic belief systems underlying the core values of Indian people (Fusilier & Durlabhji, 2001). Therefore, it could be assumed that in a Western context, marketers’ karmic beliefs might influence their personal values. The H-V theory argues that marketers’ personal values influence their ethical decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). The literature reviewed in this section illustrates this influence, which will set the foundation for the discussion presented later in this thesis.

The empirical literature on the H-V model has studied the value systems that are incorporated in the Rokeach Value Survey (Akaah & Lund, 1994); AMA’s Professional Values (Singhapakdi, Rao, & Vitell, 1996); Kahle’s List of Values (Rallapalli et al., 2000); and
Hofstede’s and Schwartz’s dimensions (Vitell & Paolillo, 2004). As an example, a mail survey with marketing professionals in America has shown that honesty is a personal value that explains the differences in marketers’ ethical decisions (Akaah & Lund, 1994). Another survey study by Nevins, Bearden, and Money (2007) has indicated that stronger ethical values of marketers could be formed by their higher levels of long-term orientation, which is defined as the extent to which they plan for and consider the future, and value the past traditions. Based on the data collected from business students in America, Nevins et al. (2007) found that individuals with higher long-term orientation possessed higher levels of ethical values. As we will see in later sections, from a religious perspective, a belief in karma shapes consumers’ long-term orientation (Kopalle et al., 2010). A belief in karma also leads to higher karma orientation, which is a value that leads to more ethical behaviours among religious salespeople (Singh & Singh, 2012). Altogether, previous research seems to support the assumption that a belief in karma would influence ethical decision-making of marketing managers; this is a hypothesis that the current thesis aims to explore.

2.3.2.3 The influence of marketer’s belief systems on ethical decision-making

The literature contributing to an understanding of the influence of marketers’ belief systems on their ethical decisions has examined machiavellianism and locus of control. This literature includes the empirical studies by Singhapakdi and Vitell (1990), Singhapakdi and Vitell (1991), Singhapakdi (1993), Bass et al. (1999), and Trevino and Youngblood (1990). Other belief systems that have been empirically investigated include the love of money (Singhapakdi et al., 2013) and the ‘just world’ belief (Ashkanasy et al., 2006; Bass et al., 1999; Bass & Tomkiewicz, 2002; Kulow & Kramer, 2016). The current literature on the effects of karmic beliefs on decision-making in marketing is limited. This literature has typically explored karmic beliefs in the context of consumers and salespeople, and from an Eastern religious perspective; none has implications among marketing managers in a Western context and in light of the H-V model. As mentioned previously, probably because the H-V theory was developed in a Western context and a belief in karma is traditionally more prevalent in an Eastern religious context, this belief has not been explored through the lens of the H-V model.

Machiavellianism and love of money have been proven to support the H-V model. A review of the empirical evidence for the influence of machiavellianism and love of money on ethical marketing decisions will set the foundation for the discussion presented later in this thesis. Machiavellianism is a personal characteristic reflecting an individual’s manipulative and
unethical strategy to deal with people (Hunt & Chonko, 1984). In a survey research conducted with American marketing professionals, Singhapakdi (1993) found a negative relationship between machiavellianism and ethical decisions. This finding is consistent with those empirically found by Singhapakdi and Vitell (1990) and Singhapakdi and Vitell (1991). In their separate surveys with marketing professionals in America, Singhapakdi and Vitell (1991) found that marketers with low machiavellianism tended to be more ethical in a deontological sense, meaning they were higher in their levels of belief with regard to relevant guidelines, values, or rules of behaviours. Vice versa, marketers with high machiavellianism tended to perceive ethical problems as less serious than marketers with low machiavellianism (Singhapakdi & Vitell, 1990). Another study conducted with American marketing professionals has confirmed a strong negative correlation between machiavellianism and ethical decisions: marketing professionals who are high in machiavellianism behave inconsistently with conventional morality (Bass et al., 1999).

On the same vein, the empirical research has found a significant negative correlation between marketers’ love of money and their ethical decisions. From a survey with marketing managers in America, Singhapakdi et al. (2013) concluded that those with higher love of money tended to be less ethical in their intentions than those with lower love of money. An individual’s love of money relates money directly to their personal greed. It can be measured by their values, wants, desires, the meaning and importance of money to the individual (Singhapakdi et al., 2013). People with high love of money generally want to be rich and consider money to be an important success symbol. As we will see in later sections about karma, the characteristics of machiavellianism and love of money seem to contradict with those of karma. This raises an assumption that karmic beliefs would positively influence marketers’ ethical decisions.

Regarding the influence of locus of control and just world beliefs on marketers’ ethical decisions, the current literature seems to suggest mixed findings. These beliefs potentially relate to a belief in karma, and therefore are discussed here. Firstly, a locus of control is an individual’s belief system regarding how much control they have over their life events (Bass et al., 1999; Singhapakdi & Vitell, 1991; Trevino & Youngblood, 1990). People with a high/external locus of control believe that external factors beyond their control cause events happening to them (Bass et al., 1999). Whereas, those with a low/internal locus of control believe that they have control over their lives, meaning that things happening in their lives are because of their own behaviours (Trevino & Youngblood, 1990).
One might question if a belief in karma is identical to locus of control. Although there seems to be no empirical research analysing the relationship between these two belief systems (Phillips, Cheng, Oemig, Hietbrink, & Vonnegut, 2012), the current literature seems to support an understanding that they are not identical beliefs. Firstly, the empirical study by Kopalle et al. (2010) measured these beliefs separately with locus of control scale (Rotter, 1966) and karma scale (Kopalle et al., 2010). A belief in karma significantly affects the expectation and long-term orientation of consumers in India, but locus of control does not (Kopalle et al., 2010). These findings suggest that these beliefs are different. Secondly, other studies have suggested conflicting views about the association between locus of control and karmic beliefs. In a survey research to examine various factors explaining locus of control of Indian people, Khanna and Khanna (1979) found that a belief in karma was moderately associated with an external locus of control. Whilst, researchers in both Eastern and Western contexts suggest that a belief in karma entails both external and internal locus of control (Ozer, 2010; Phillips et al., 2012). Ozer (2010, p. 10) explains that locus of control in an Eastern context is based on “a comprehensible dialectic relationship between individual agency and karmic response”. Therefore, it could be understood from the current literature that a belief in karma and locus of control are not identical, and karmic beliefs might entail components of locus of control.

Existing studies have shown mixed results about the influence of locus of control on ethical decision-making (Lehnert et al., 2015). For example, in a mail survey with marketing professionals America, Singhapakdi and Vitell (1990) did not find a relationship between locus of control and (i) perceived ethical problem, and (ii) various dimensions of perceived alternatives. Hence, they questioned if locus of control is a perceptual factor of marketing ethics. Similarly, Bass et al. (1999) found no relationship between locus of control and ethical judgments and ethical behavioural intentions, based on a mail survey with marketing professionals in America. However, via research with MBA students in America, Trevino and Youngblood (1990) found that locus of control influences ethical decision-making directly. Thus, it could be seen from previous research that locus of control might influence ethical decision-making in marketing although it might not apply to all marketers.

Secondly, a just world belief is a personal belief system (Ashkanasy et al., 2006) that refers to the extent to which people think that the world is a fair place and people will get what they deserve (Ashkanasy et al., 2006; Banerjee & Bloom, 2017; Mulla & Krishnan, 2014; Young et al., 2011). People with a strong just world belief tend to believe that a person’s merits in life
are closely aligned, and that a person’s unfortunate situations are the punishment of their moral defect (Bass & Tomkiewicz, 2002). A just world belief is both theoretically and empirically distinct from locus of control (Ashkanasy et al., 2006).

A just world belief is distinct from a belief in karma (White et al., 2018). In a survey research conducted with adults in America, Canada, and India, White et al. (2018) found that there was a positive correlation between a belief in karma and a belief in a just world, but these correlations were modest. A belief in karma could explain some variances in expectations of interpersonal punishments and rewards, which could not be completely explained by a just world belief (White et al., 2018). Likewise, Kulow and Kramer (2016) found that an individual’s beliefs in a just world could partially predict, but could not explain completely, their beliefs in karma. This finding was from a study conducted with American consumers. Its results showed that the correlation between participants’ beliefs in a just world and beliefs in karma was low but significant ($r = .30, p < .001$). Taken together, the findings from previous research suggest a possibility that karmic beliefs entail components of a just world belief.

A survey conducted with marketing professionals in America by Bass et al. (1999) did not find a link between just world beliefs and ethical judgments, nor between just world beliefs and ethical intentions. However, based on a survey with graduate business students in America, Bass and Tomkiewicz (2002) suggested that just world beliefs could be related to ethical judgments for situations where individuals viewed a behaviour as relatively unethical. For situations where the behaviour was seen as relatively less unethical, the relation might not hold (Bass & Tomkiewicz, 2002). In a study with MBA students in Australia, Ashkanasy et al. (2006) found that just world beliefs influenced managers’ ethical decisions, but this influence did not apply to all managers.

Counting them all, the findings of previous research on the influence of locus of control and just world beliefs on ethical decision-making are inconsistent and contradictory. Nonetheless, there is a reason to believe that just world beliefs and locus of control influence ethical decisions, at least in some situations. Previous research has also suggested a possibility that karmic beliefs might entail components of just world belief and locus of control. Thus, it could be assumed that a belief in karma might be linked to ethical decision-making in marketing; yet this has not yet been empirically tested. This thesis seeks to investigate this assumption.
2.4  Karma

This section aims to explore the notion of karma, especially in relation to the morality of a marketing decision. Originally coming from Sanskrit which means “act, action, performance, deed” (Chapple, 1986, p. 2), the word karma has found a home in the contemporary Western culture. It has become common in the English language with entries in English dictionaries such as Webster Dictionaries (n.d.) and Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.); in lyrics of popular music; movies; news articles; marketing and/or advertising campaigns. The term karma is used “to denote action (including behaviour, speech, or thought) that results in consequences … Because karma involves behaviours, it is of relevance to psychology. Indeed, it might be seen as a hypothesis about the causes of different types of life outcomes” (Allen et al., 2015, p. 2).

Some key concepts from Allen et al.’s (2015) quote above align with the constructs of the H-V model discussed in the previous sections: actions and/or behaviours, thought and/or intention, consequences and/or outcomes. It is vital for marketers to understand the consequences that their marketing behaviours produce, especially in terms of ethical aspects (Chonko, 1995). The H-V model argues that ethical behaviours depend heavily on marketers’ intentions, which are influenced by their belief systems (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). This section begins with an introduction to the concept of karma. It then presents various principles and values that constitute karmic belief systems. This review provides a foundation for the subsequent discussions on how a belief in karma might affect marketers’ decision-making process.

2.4.1  An overview of the notion of karma

“Karma literally means ‘the results of our actions’” (Borden & Shekhawat, 2010, p. 146). Originating from Indian history, karma is a belief system that is central in many Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism (Reichenbach, 1990; White et al., 2018). Meanwhile, a belief in karma is independent of religion (Allen et al., 2015; Banerjee & Bloom, 2017). From a religious perspective, although different religions interpret karma differently, there are some common principles. They include: (i) all actions that we can be held morally accountable have consequences; (ii) moral actions have consequences according to the character of the actions: right actions lead to good consequences and wrong actions result in bad consequences; (iii) some consequences are manifested immediately or in this life, some in
the next life, and some remotely; (iv) the effects of our actions can be accumulated; and (v) people are reborn in accordance with their actions in the previous lives (Reichenbach, 1990).

Karma is one of the most basic belief systems underlying Indian people’s core values (Fusilier & Durlabhji, 2001). Kopalle et al. (2010) note that most of Indian society believes in karma given it is a key doctrine in Hinduism. Bhangaokar and Kapadia (2009) suggest that karma is among the key concepts that decrypts right (or wrong) behaviours in a contemporary urban Indian context, e.g., among non-religious Indian people. Arguing that most understanding about the karma concept is theoretical and not empirical, Bhangaokar and Kapadia (2009) conducted in-depth interviews with non-religious people in India to ask them to define and interpret the idea of karma in their everyday life. While the theory of transmigration and rebirth is an interpretation of karma in Eastern religions, Bhangaokar and Kapadia (2009) did not find a support in empirical data. Their research found that the respondents concentrated more on distinguishing actions as good or bad in their immediate, everyday life with corresponding outcomes. Even though the causal relationship between actions and outcomes was mentioned as a characteristic of karma, it was not always collocated in a rebirth and transmigration framework (Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009). These findings seem to support Allen et al. (2015) who argues that a belief in karma is a natural and psychological phenomenon that has scientific validity, as we will see in section 2.4.2.

With Westerners, karma is not unfamiliar (Allen et al., 2015; Banerjee & Bloom, 2017). As an example, the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) gives an informal meaning of karma: “Good or bad luck, viewed as resulting from one's actions”. To elaborate on this, the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) outlines some examples, such as “Who do you think will receive the karma in the end?”; “To those who understand the effects that karma has on our lives it may also be a teacher, with a lesson plan on patience, confidence, self-reliance, restraint, and power”. Moreover, in Western cultures, various examples suggest that the karma notion exists, such as the common sayings “what goes around comes around”, “you reap what you sow” (Banerjee & Bloom, 2017; Kulow & Kramer, 2016); or the belief that sins lead to punishment and virtue leads to rewards (Converse et al., 2012). When interviewing young Australian drivers to explore their perceptions of safe driving, Kleisen (2013) found the term “car karma”. According to the interviewees, this meant if other drivers let them in, they felt obliged to let someone else in and if other drivers cut them off, they did not want to let other drivers in at all; or if they started the day with letting somebody in, the rest of the drive should be fine.
The literature has suggested that a belief in karma could be inherently rooted in a natural interpretation of life events in terms of the desired purpose and meaning. Even without an explicit theistic or religious belief, a belief in karma still emerges naturally as a by-product of humans’ social cognition (Banerjee & Bloom, 2017). This is because of the common social expectation such as good things would happen to good people, criminals and benefactors should be punished and rewarded respectively (Converse et al., 2012). Allen et al. (2015) argue that this belief is not unique to religious people because non-religious people seem to believe in karma (e.g., “what goes around comes around”).

The central tenet of karma focuses on the fruits of actions (Kopalle et al., 2010; Pio, 2005). Karma suggests that whenever there is an action, there will be consequences that will affect the doer of the action (Allen et al., 2015; Reichenbach, 1988). The law of karma is referred to as “karmic law of cause and effect or causality” (Abeydeera et al., 2016, p. 53) or “moral law of causation” (Kulow & Kramer, 2016, p. 335). As elaborated by Allen et al. (2015, p. 5): “All classical accounts of karma have an element of ethicization [sic], such that actions relevant to karma have a positive, negative, or neutral moral quality. Negative actions are those that harm another living being, and lead to negative consequences for the actor. Positive actions benefit others and lead to positive outcomes for the actor”. This view is consistent with Reichenbach (1988) who argues that karmic law is an application of the universal causation law because it is a causal law that is rooted in ethical consideration. Thus, it seems fair to assume that marketers’ karmic beliefs might influence their ethical decisions, regardless of the cultural or religious context. The next section will uncover karma from a Western perspective where it is seen as a universal and cross-culturally concept with scientific validity.

2.4.2 The karma notion as seen from a Western scientific perspective

The literature on karma is extensive, yet most of the research has looked at karma as an Eastern religious belief. There seems to be limited research examining karmic beliefs within a Western context. This could be why this literature has dedicated a major part of their essays to substantiate that karma is a universal concept. As an example, in their article on American consumers’ beliefs in karma in relation to prosocial behaviours, Kulow and Kramer (2016) begin with a quote from former Guns ‘N Roses lead guitarist Slash. The quote says, “Once you’ve lived a little you will find that whatever you send out into the world comes back to you in one way or another. It may be today, tomorrow, or years from now, but it happens; usually when you least expect it, usually in a form that’s pretty different from the original”. This quote,
according to Kulow and Kramer, reflects the pinnacle notion of karma. In the same article, Kulow and Kramer also use examples from the television series “My Name Is Earl” and the song “Karma Chameleon” to posit that a belief in karma is ubiquitous.

Although a belief in karma is implicitly assumed in most cultures, it has not yet received much attention from a social science perspective (Allen et al., 2015). According to Allen et al. (2015), Western psychologists started conducting research on karmic beliefs in the early 1980s but to date, this research is still thin. This limited literature, notwithstanding, has offered extensive insights and analyses into karma from a Western scientific view. It suggests that karma has some scientific validity, and is not a magical or superficial belief (Allen et al., 2015). It is worth reviewing this literature. This helps a better understanding of karma from a scientific point of view and the ubiquity of karma in everyday life (e.g., beyond Eastern religions and cultures). More importantly, this literature helps to envision the link between a belief in karma and ethical decision-making in marketing, which is the aim of this thesis.

Reichenbach (1988) contributes to an understanding of karma from modern theories. He has critically examined and compared Hindu karma and law of universal causation. Several highlights should be noted from his differentiation between the two laws. Firstly, both laws are concerned with the results or the consequences of actions. The karmic law states that all actions have consequences; the universal causation law states that every action is caused. Nonetheless, while the universal causal law is concerned with consequences regardless of whom they affect, the karmic law is concerned with the effects on the actors. Secondly, the law of universal causation suggests that the production of effects does not depend on the doers’ intentions but on their actions. Whereas, karmic effects depend on both intentions and actions of doers. Thirdly, the law of karma regulates that like causes produce like effects: the right and wrong actions respectively produce good and bad consequences. This feature is not observable with the universal causal law. Fourthly, moral judgment is the key difference between the two laws: the causal law holds irrespective of moral judgment, while morality is a key feature of the karmic law. Fifthly, the immediacy of the temporal relation is significantly different between the two laws. The law of karma states that the consequences might happen in the distant future, even in the next life or in more temporally remote lives. However, the law of causation applies to two events that are temporally conjoined. As a conclusion, Reichenbach (1988) states that the karmic law is a special application of the universal causal law, and can be understood as a moral law of causation.
Converse et al. (2012) have conducted a series of four different experiments with nonreligious adults in America and found that karmic beliefs led adults to actively invest in future karma. Their research suggested that people make karmic investments by engaging in prosocial acts to hope to influence future outcomes. This is because people in this research expected that proactively doing good deeds for others, for example donating money to charity, would help them accumulate good karma for themselves (Converse et al., 2012).

In their theory paper to demonstrate the scientific validity of a belief in karma, Allen et al. (2015) have extensively analysed and compared the Buddhist karmic philosophy to the Western psychological concept of construct activation, which is a foundational concept of social cognitive psychology. One key overlap that Allen and his colleagues identify is the idea that people’s actions should determine their impressions of future events. This is because the content of people’s mind influences what they perceive and experience, which in turn affect their interpretation and negotiation of new situations. There are some factors (see Figure 3) that increase the accessibility of the karmic impression, that is the “weight of karma” (Allen et al., 2015, p. 5) or the degree that an action will plant a mental seed, and hence will increase the likelihood of experiencing accordant results. Allen and his colleagues posit that Buddhist karmic psychology offers testable propositions and should be brought within the realm of scientific inquiry. In their words, “karma can be conceptualised and tested in terms of modern theories of social cognition ... Western scientific evidence for karmic effects could motivate people to act pro-socially to obtain better outcomes for themselves” (Allen et al., 2015, p. 14).

1. Action done with strong emotion, like anger (or joy)
2. Action done with strong intention and effort
3. Action done resulting from three poisons of attachment, aversion, and ignorance
4. Action done deliberately, premeditated, without restraint (versus involuntarily)
5. Owning the action, having no regret
6. Bragging about the action to others
7. Action done repeatedly
8. Pulling others into the bad deed
9. Action done toward a holy object (a divine being, spiritual teachers, symbols of your spiritual life)
10. Action done toward a person who has really helped you (your parents, your pastor/teacher, etc.)
11. Action done toward someone who is in great need

Figure 3: Factors that increase accessibility of a karmic impression.

Finally, the research conducted by Banerjee and Bloom (2017) with American children has suggested that children hold a belief in karma although they are not religious. This experimental study investigated 4–6-year-old children’s willingness to endorse and engage in karmic
bargaining, which is the behaviour of doing good acts to secure an unrelated future desired outcome. The results showed that about half of the children engaged in karmic bargaining behaviours, which suggested that a belief in karma might reflect a broad and early-emerging bias of people to interpret their life events (Banerjee & Bloom, 2017).

Having reviewed the definition and key aspects of karma from both Eastern and Western perspectives, this chapter moves on to review the literature on the ethical implications of karma in business, management, and marketing.

2.5 Karma and its implications in business, management and marketing

2.5.1 Karmic beliefs and ethical decisions in business and management context

The literature on the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on business and/or management practices has revealed the role of karmic beliefs on ethical behaviours in organisations, in both Eastern and Western contexts. Being a key doctrine of these Eastern religions, karmic beliefs have useful implications for personal and professional well-being (Marques, 2010, 2012); corporate citizenship and CSR (Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013; Pio, 2005); and entrepreneurialism including social entrepreneurship (Budhiastra, 2016; Valliere, 2008). A summary of representative literature is presented below; its snapshot is shown in Appendix D.

In an Eastern context, when studying the implications of Hinduism philosophies in business and/or management practice, the empirical research has found that a belief in karma can drive corporate citizenship (Pio, 2005), enhance transformational leadership (Agarwalla, Seshadri, & Krishnan, 2015), and lead to more ethical leadership behaviours among managers and business leaders (Ananthram & Chan, 2016). At a conceptual level, the literature suggests that a belief in karma is relevant to CSR because it motivates organisations to carry out activities to serve humanity (Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013). In tourism, Budhiastra (2016) conceptually proposes a sustainable tourism strategy that is based on two karmic philosophies: Firstly, God provides the earth with various resources for human development; thus something should be given back to God. Secondly, natural resources are limited and cannot be reproduced once destroyed or depleted (Budhiastra, 2016).

In both Eastern and Western contexts, when exploring the influence of Buddhism on entrepreneurs’ decisions, Valliere (2008) has found that karmic beliefs affect entrepreneurs’ goal-setting and the objectives pursued by their entrepreneurial decisions. These findings were
from interviews with Buddhist entrepreneurs in Nepal and Canada. The desire for a livelihood that avoids creating negative karma motivates Buddhist entrepreneurs to view their career activities as an antecedent to create karma for themselves. That is, generating personal wealth at the expense of other people may create bad karma, while doing business to improve society while incidentally generating modest profits may not create bad karma (Valliere, 2008).

A systematic literature review by Abeydeera et al. (2016) suggests that a belief in karma has implications in several areas of sustainability-related organisational practices. This review analyses how current literature acknowledges Buddhism philosophies to inform sustainability, and discusses key Buddhist principles such as the Four noble truths, the Noble eightfold path, the Law of karma, and Compassion. All these principles enable the possibility of fostering sustainability in organisations. These sustainable practices include: decision-making and problem solving; leadership; human resource (HR) management; and organisational change and learning (Abeydeera et al., 2016).

When exploring the main elements of Buddhist practices that can enhance personal and professional well-being in contemporary organisations, Marques (2010) has found a role of karmic beliefs. This finding was from interviews with Buddhist masters and Buddhist business executives in America, Tibet and India. The research suggested that because Buddhists are strong on karmic beliefs, they have greater responsibility for their current actions, hence they are aware of future negative consequences that occur due to these actions. In addition, Buddhist workers are better team players without selfish agenda, because of their mind-sets of giving, respecting, collaborating, being compassionate, and a belief that doing good will generate good karma (Marques, 2010).

In another research to study the application of Buddhist philosophies to consciousness at work, Marques (2012) conceptually suggests that a belief in karma is helpful in the workplace because it encourages workers to consider carefully before engaging in unethical and harmful practices toward others. This is because karmic beliefs assume that the way we treat stakeholders will come back to us. In her opinion, “[a]ttaining expanded and purified consciousness is only possible when a person deliberately strives toward achieving an amplified degree of wakefulness” (Marques, 2012, p. 31). Karma, together with other Buddhist doctrines, can serve as starting points towards expanded and purified consciousness. Consciousness at work can guide businesspeople to act, think, and decide in a way that enhances their quality of life and the lives of their stakeholders. It can also provide an
alternative ethical system against the ascending unethical behaviours in the business world (Marques, 2012). However, these conceptual propositions have not yet been empirically tested. So far, all the reviewed studies seem to support a hypothesis that applying karmic principals to marketing practices might bring positive impacts for individuals, organisations, and society.

2.5.2 Karmic belief and ethical decisions in marketing and sales context

In view of all that has been discussed so far, one may assume that a belief in karma would have meaningful implications for marketing practices, at least from a religious perspective. Nonetheless, the research on the impact of the karmic belief in marketing management is rare (e.g., Low, 2013; Singh & Singh, 2012, 2015). Within a consumer-marketing context, the literature has suggested a positive relationship between a karmic belief and consumers’ ethical behaviours. In the recent years, this literature is limited and mainly from an Eastern religious perspective. Kulow and Kramer (2016) notes that although the idea of karma resonates with many individuals, its systematic effect on consumer behaviours has been under researched. The key findings of this literature are presented in two parts. The first part (section 2.5.2.1) explores the influences of religions, which includes the role of karmic beliefs, on consumer behaviours. The second part (section 2.5.2.2) examines karmic beliefs as predictor variables of ethical behaviours in a marketing context. Appendix D shows a snapshot of these studies.

2.5.2.1 The influences of religions, including the role of karmic beliefs, on consumer behaviours

The literature on the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on consumer behaviours has revealed the role of karmic beliefs, mainly in an Eastern context. The findings from this research suggest that karma is one of the key religious philosophies that lead to ethical behaviours among consumers. Although this literature provides some insights about potential influences of karmic beliefs on marketing practices, it does not provide a thorough understanding of how karmic beliefs can predict ethical behaviours of marketing managers. For instance, Pace (2013) investigates the effects of Buddhist philosophies on consumers’ materialism and argues that Buddhism can tame materialism directly: people committed to Buddhism exhibited a lower materialism value due to certain qualities associated with Buddhism such as compassion, sympathetic joy, and a belief in karma. His research findings suggested that belief in karma would result in careful and sensible consumption acts and a reduction in materialism among Buddhist consumers. The findings were drawn from an online
survey conducted among 348 respondents represented of the USA (49%), Canada (13%), Australia (8%), the UK (6%), and India (5%) and various affiliated religions (Pace, 2013).

In another research, Choudhury (2014) has explored the interaction between Buddhism, consumerism, and materialism. The study reveals that karma is one of the Buddhist principles with meaningful implications for marketing and societal transformation. This is because Buddhism can harmonise the paradoxical entities of consumerism, materialism, and spiritualism, leading to a positive impact on society. Specifically, Choudhury (2014) finds that karmic beliefs shape our present and future, because karma implies that we cannot escape the outcomes of our karma and hence, we can create and change our destiny. Accordingly, karmic beliefs have implications toward a sustainable environment, because we ourselves create many of the troubles of our earth, it is also our capacity and power to solve them. These results were found in an ethnographic study conducted in three years through observations and in-depth interviews with Buddhist practitioners (Choudhury, 2014).

The conceptual study by Mathras et al. (2016) explores the effects of religious beliefs on consumer behaviours. They assert that a belief in karma influences consumers’ behaviours in many ways. For example, by influencing consumers’ values of long-term orientation, a belief in karma increases consumers’ behaviours aimed at improving their future such as sustainability, financial saving, and investment. Moreover, karmic beliefs guide Hindu and Buddhist followers to behave morally to avoid moral transgressions, such as following moral guidelines regarding what consumption behaviours are allowed and/or forbidden. Thus, it indirectly influences religious consumers’ consumption, such as avoiding temptation, food indulgence, and impulsive purchases (Mathras et al., 2016).

In his review research paper, Low (2013) examines a link between Buddhist philosophies and marketing disciplines. He argues that applying Buddhist thoughts, including karmic principles, can set foundations for smart and socially responsible marketing while promoting values for good living. When considering karma, “there is no need to be greedy or have hatred such as to increase market share at the expense of pushing the rivals out. Whenever one decides to do something, think it through, because in the end, one is responsible for the outcome or results” (Low, 2013, p. 622). Accordingly, when everyone does good deeds, everyone will benefit, and the result will benefit the community at large. Following karmic principals, marketers should not only be decision-makers who influence matters such as corporate investments and lifestyle choices for consumers, which shape society and society’s interaction with the environment.
They should also be healers to correct the environmental infractions caused by society. Low (2013) calls for future research to study the link between Buddhist philosophies with business disciplines, including marketing and management.

The above view of Low (2013) seems to support emerging conversations about karma marketing, a notion of sustainable marketing (Kho, 2015; Laukaikul, 2015). Being a brand strategist, Laukaikul (2015) advocates karma marketing because she believes that the karmic law reflects in real time in marketers’ daily life. For example, marketers could be their own victims if they execute campaigns that harm the environment, which negatively affects the quality of water, air, and food. This is because marketers would have to consume this polluted water, air, and food. As such, marketers should consider their missions to ensure that they and society have sufficient and quality resources to use in the future (Kho, 2015; Laukaikul, 2015). In the same way, organisations and business schools in America have increasingly adopting karma capitalism, the idea that companies should create value and social justice at the same time (Engardio & McGregor, 2006). From a karmic perspective, current actions determine the future lives; therefore, we should make our actions right from today by switching from “greed” to “green” (Engardio & McGregor, 2006). Overall, the evidence reviewed seems to suggest a pertinent role for karmic beliefs in ethical decisions of marketing managers. Nonetheless, such insight is still lacking in the empirical literature.

2.5.2.2 Karmic beliefs as a direct construct predicting ethical behaviours in a marketing and/or sales context

Currently, there seems to be limited research adopting a belief in karma as a direct construct to predict ethical behaviours in a marketing context. As seen throughout this section, this limited literature argues for the influence of a belief in karma on ethical behaviours of consumers and salespeople. The studies from Kopalle et al. (2010) and Kulow and Kramer (2016) focus on consumers; the studies from Singh and Singh (2012) and Singh and Singh (2015) focus on sales managers. Only Kulow and Kramer (2016) study karmic beliefs from a nonreligious perspective in a Western context; others have examined karma from an Eastern religious perspective and/or in an Eastern context. None of this literature has investigated a belief in karma as a personal belief to predict ethical behaviours of marketing managers.

Firstly, a belief in karma is empirically proven to influence consumer behaviour in both Eastern and Western contexts. In an Eastern context, Kopalle et al. (2010) found that a stronger belief
in karma led to higher consumer expectations through its influence on consumers’ long-term orientation. Consumers who believe in karma have a higher long-term orientation, and hence have higher expectations toward a product or service, which then affect their levels of satisfaction with a product or service experience. These findings were from surveys conducted in India, where most people believe in karma because of the prevalence of Hinduism (Kopalle et al., 2010). The findings of long-term orientation seems to support the view from Mathras et al. (2016) as discussed earlier, that a belief in karma influences consumers’ values of long-term orientation, which increases their sustainable behaviours.

In a Western context, Kulow and Kramer (2016) have reported that consumers who believe in karma are more likely to engage in prosocial acts to seek good karma. A belief in karma has manifested a causal link of current actions resulting in either future rewards or consequences, which ultimately affects consumers’ current behaviours. These results were found from a series of experimental studies with adults in America. Thus, marketers should consider consumers’ karmic beliefs when seeking to incentivise their prosocial behaviours because a belief in karma leads consumers to greater intentions to support a charity (Kulow & Kramer, 2016).

Secondly, from an Eastern religious perspective and in a sales context, a belief in karma may influence ethical behaviours as suggested by Singh and Singh (2012). In their conceptual paper, Singh and Singh (2012) propose that salespeople’s karma orientation helps develop positive relationships with customers, enhance selling effectiveness and ethical behaviours. Karma orientation is “a cognitive awakening in an individual having beliefs in one’s karma, which sets a chain of causes culminating in a karmic fruit” (Singh & Singh, 2012, p. 141). Based on the theoretical foundations of the H-V theory by Hunt and Vitell (1986), Singh and Singh assert that a higher karma orientation of salespeople would lead to higher ethical behaviours. This is because in when making decisions, salespeople would first perceive the ethical problem, then perceive the alternative solutions, and finally perceive the consequences of their behaviours. These perceptions are influenced by environmental factors such as cultural environment, professional environment, industry environment, and organisational environment. When examining karma through the lens of the H-V model, Singh and Singh suggest that karmic oriented salespeople would be more concerned with their stakeholders and society, less likely to be driven by selfish motives. Moreover, they are more equable and less likely to be influenced by the environmental factors, making them more ethical in their behaviours. Karmic
oriented salespeople are less likely to face role conflicts and have higher emotional well-being (Singh & Singh, 2012).

Expecting that a karma orientation would provide a more meaningful work and life for salespeople, Singh and Singh (2012) call for future research to test their propositions. They also recommend several areas for future research. These include exploring their concepts outside the context of sales and empirically validating the hypotheses through qualitative studies such as in-depth interviews. Singh and Singh’s (2012) hypothesis of a positive correlation between karma orientation and customer orientation of salespeople has been ascertained by empirical evidence from Singh and Singh (2015). In a survey with Indian salespeople, Singh and Singh (2015) found that higher levels of karma orientation lead to higher levels of customer orientation.

To sum up, from an Eastern religious perspective, the literature has shown that a belief in karma influences consumer behaviours; while the conceptual literature has suggested that a belief in karma leads to ethical behaviours among salespeople. In a Western context, a belief in karma is empirically proven to influence consumers’ prosocial behaviours. It is assumed that in a Western context, marketing managers are familiar with the karma concept and this belief would influence their decision-making process, which is an exploration that this thesis seeks to focus.

2.6 The research context of marketing managers in New Zealand

As mentioned throughout this chapter, previous marketing ethics research has not yet studied the influence of marketing managers’ beliefs in karma on their decision-making in a Western context. This study seeks to make this contribution to the literature. According to Statistics New Zealand (2014), among all New Zealanders who stated their religious affiliation, 41.9 percent reported that they had no religion, and 48.9 percent affiliated themselves with a Christian religion. Therefore, marketing managers in New Zealand are deemed appropriate respondents for this research so that the perceptions of karma would be understood without bias to an Eastern religious perspective.

Concerning the pervasiveness of karma in New Zealand, the public is somewhat familiar with this notion. For example, Factiva online database found more than 320 articles published in the New Zealand press in the last five years containing the term “karma”. One of them was an article in The New Zealand Herald on May 26th 2018 which used the headline “There is good
karma floating all around” when talking about a donation that raised more than $25,000 in the first few days (Leask, 2018). Another article in the Sunday Star Times on the 12th of February 2017 reported that “Profit and charity aren’t two words usually associated with one another, but a growing number of Kiwi entrepreneurs are mixing business with karma to create social change.” (“SUNSTT,” 2017). Back to the 23rd of December 2016, when talking about a man who found $10,000 on the road and returned it, an article on The Dominion Post stated “Nigel Edwards is buying himself a Lotto ticket after Christmas. The 58-year-old athletics coach reckons he’s got some good karma coming his way after he found $10,000 lying on the side of the road - and returned it to its rightful owner” (Dennett, 2016).

Moreover, businesses in New Zealand have been “trading” this karma concept. One example is KarmaCola which is a soft-drink brand produced and marketed by a New Zealand-based company named All Good Organics. KarmaCola’s branding elements, including its brand name, packing, product story and advertising campaign play with the idea of ‘what goes around comes around’, the virtuous circles and the ‘ouroboros’ infinity symbol (Sinclair, 2016). In its advertising campaigns, KarmaCola explains its karmic philosophy of being a sugary drink as a treat, while including the consumer in the process of “doing good”. It consistently uses the term “What goes around comes around” and elaborates further how the brand does good for the people who grow the product, good for the land and good for consumers (Sinclair, 2016).

On KarmaCola’s website, the first screen of the “Our Story” section shows only one phrase in the capital font: “WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND”. This leads to the next screens where the story is further elaborated (in normal text format). The story says:

“We believe what you drink should not only taste good, it should be good for the land, good for the people who grow the ingredients and as good for you as a fizzy drink can be.”

“We set up the Karma Cola Foundation to make sure the people who grow our cola get something back from the people who drink it.”

(KarmaCola, 2018)

Another example is the six-week campaign “It’s a karma thing” conducted in 2012 by LoveNZ to encourage New Zealand people to recycle their drink and food containers into LoveNZ recycle bins nationwide. Championed by various commercial organisations (Coca-Cola, Amatil NZ, Trade Me, Vodafone, The Warehouse and Countdown) and supported by councils
and venues across the country, the campaign called for participation from people by saying, “We all know how Karma works… do good things and good things will come back to you” ("It's a karma thing," 2012).

These examples suggest that some New Zealand businesses have incorporated the concept of karma into their branding and/or marketing activities. This thesis will explore a general perception of the influence of karma on ethical decision-making from the perspective of marketing managers in New Zealand.

2.7 Synthesis of the literature review

The H-V theory of marketing ethics suggests that marketing managers’ ethical decisions are influenced by their belief systems (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). However, it does not define these beliefs explicitly (Rallapalli et al., 2000). The literature has examined belief systems such as machiavellianism; locus of control (Hunt & Vitell, 1993, 2006); love of money (Singhapakdi et al., 2013); and belief in a just world (Ashkanasy et al., 2006; Bass et al., 1999; Bass & Tomkiewicz, 2002; Kulow & Kramer, 2016). It remains an unanswered question if marketing managers’ karmic belief systems would influence their decision-making as informed by the H-V model.

Although karma is a universal belief, a natural and psychological phenomenon that has scientific validity (Allen et al., 2015; Banerjee & Bloom, 2017; Converse et al., 2012), the literature on the role karmic beliefs in predicting marketing managers’ decisions in a Western context is rare. In a Western context and from a non-religious perspective, the literature has found that non-religious adults and children endorse and engage in karmic investment behaviours (Banerjee & Bloom, 2017; Kulow & Kramer, 2016). The literature has also shown that people who believe in karma are more long-term oriented, and more likely to engage in prosocial acts (Converse et al., 2012; Kulow & Kramer, 2016). Besides, it is also known from the literature in a Western context that long-term orientation is a personal value that leads to more ethical behaviours in business (Nevins et al., 2007). Thus, previous research seems to support a hypothesis that karmic beliefs would influence the ethical behaviours of marketing managers in a Western context.

Within a religious realm, karma is a central belief system of many Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism (White et al., 2017; Young et al., 2011). In marketing, a belief in
karma influences the behaviours of religious consumers (e.g., Choudhury, 2014; Kopalle et al., 2010; Mathras et al., 2016; Pace, 2013). For example, it can result in careful and sensible consumption acts and a reduction in materialism amongst consumers (Pace, 2013); and influence the long-term orientation of religious consumers (Kopalle et al., 2010). In a sales context, karmic beliefs motivate more ethical behaviours of religious salespeople, because they are more concerned with their stakeholders and society (Singh & Singh, 2012). A karmic belief encourages salespeople to be more customer oriented (Singh & Singh, 2012, 2015). Moreover, karmic principles can inspire socially responsible marketing while promoting values for good living because it encourage people to do good deeds, which benefit everyone including the community at large (Low, 2013).

Furthermore, the current literature has confirmed the influences of Eastern religious philosophies, including karmic beliefs, on ethical decisions made in a general business and/or a management context, both in Western and Eastern cultures (e.g., Abeydeera et al., 2016; Ananthram & Chan, 2016; Marques, 2012; Valliere, 2008). These influences include enhancing transformational leadership (Agarwalla et al., 2015); motivating more ethical leadership behaviours (Ananthram & Chan, 2016); driving corporate citizenship (Pio, 2005) and CSR (Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013); elevating more sustainability-related organisational practices (Abeydeera et al., 2016); guiding entrepreneurs to set decent business goals and profitability (Valliere, 2008); and inspiring sustainable tourism strategy (Budhiastra, 2016). Therefore, it could be assumed that karmic beliefs can help predict ethical behaviours of marketing managers, at least in a religious context; however, this has not yet been empirically tested.

Taken together, previous research seems to support the assumption that whenever karmic oriented marketing marketers make decisions, they would not only evaluate their duty commitments with their companies and short-term profits for the shareholders. They would also consider the sustainable benefits and long-term consequences that their marketing decisions might bring to themselves and wider stakeholders, including the environment and society. This thesis seeks to explore these assumptions amongst marketing managers in New Zealand, where there have been some businesses incorporating the concept of karma into their branding and/or marketing activities.
3. Chapter Three: Methodology

This thesis aimed to answer the overarching research question:

**How does a belief in karma influence ethical decision-making in marketing?**

To address this question, it was deemed necessary to:

i. Understand what marketing managers believe karma to entail.

ii. Understand marketing managers’ perceptions of the differences in the decisions made between managers who are karmic oriented compared to those who are not.

iii. Understand how a belief in karma informs the H-V theory.

To gain insights into the above questions, this research employed a qualitative research approach based on a constructivist worldview, a phenomenological design, and an in-depth interview method. This chapter presents the methodology adopted for this research with the rationales (section 3.1), and the ethical consideration (section 3.2). It describes the research procedures (section 3.3), including the sampling strategy and population, respondent profiles, the data gathering and recording procedures, and the analysis and interpretation of the research data. This chapter also outlines the limitations of the chosen methodology (section 3.4).

### 3.1 Justification of the research approach

Following the recommendation from Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach was chosen for this study based on a consideration of three components, namely the philosophical worldview, the research design, and the specific research methods.

#### 3.1.1 The philosophical worldview

Constructivism was adopted for this study. It is also known as social constructivism and is often combined with interpretivism (Creswell, 2014). The way that a researcher adopts a research approach rests on a foundation of ontological and epistemological assumptions (Neuman, 2014), or the researcher’s worldviews (Creswell, 2014). Worldview, the first component to consider in the process of choosing a research approach, is defined as “a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of the research that a researcher brings
According to Creswell (2014), four widely used worldviews include: Post-positivism, Transformative, Pragmatism, and Constructivism.

Constructivism was adopted based on the researcher’s relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, meaning that the researcher believes that knowledge is gained through the subjective perspectives of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, she conducted this research to report on the perspectives held by participants. In addition, as mentioned previously, the current research aimed to explore the influence of karmic beliefs on decision-making as perceived by marketing managers. Beliefs represent the views that people hold about an object and constitute an aspect of their world (Fishbein, 1975). As such, beliefs are subjective, varied and multiple. Thus, the researcher should adopt constructivism to seek a complexity of views rather than limiting the views into a few categories (Creswell, 2014).

Following a constructivist worldview, this research adopted a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2014). A major advantage of this approach is to study human judgment and behaviours which are naturally unpredictable and complex (Kevin, Jana, Nitish, & Yung-Hwal, 2016). Ethical decision-making is concerned with human judgment and behaviours, and each ethical decision is an individual struggle (Chonko, 1995; Kevin et al., 2016). Thus, a qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate to explore the ethical decision-making process.

3.1.2 The research designs

This study adopted a phenomenological design, which is a research method that enables the description of a “common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). This suited the researcher’s aim to understand the perceptions that the participants hold (Creswell, 2014) about karma and its influence on decision-making. Besides, phenomenology was deemed an appropriate methodology to explore the complex process of decision-making of marketing managers. The research design, also called strategies of enquiry, includes “types of enquiry within qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches that provide specific direction for procedures in research design” (Creswell, 2014, p. 12). Five common types of enquiry within a qualitative approach include: narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2013). The fundamental differences between the five qualitative approaches drawn by Creswell (2013) assisted the researcher in choosing phenomenology for this study.
3.1.3 The research methods

The chosen method for this thesis was in-depth interviews. Firstly, it enabled the researcher to collect and analyse the rich information in the words of the participants (Creswell, 2014). Secondly, the interview method was effective to uncover the meaning of the personal stories, especially in the research on decision-making which is highly personal and experiential (Kevin et al., 2016). Thirdly, because a belief in karma influences the way people interpret and react to life events (Banerjee & Bloom, 2017), it might influence the way marketing managers judge and react to dilemmas. This judgment and reaction could vary between marketing managers. Therefore, choosing in-depth interviews enabled the participants to share their own stories and perspectives. The research methods, defined as “the specific research methods that involve the forms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (Creswell, 2014, p. 16), are the third component to consider in the research methodology.

3.2 Ethical consideration

The researcher applied for and obtained ethical approval (Category B) from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Marketing, University of Otago (see Appendix A) before the final interviews were conducted. In this research, all the respondents were voluntary and pre-informed about the nature of the research. Appendix B includes the information sheet for the participants and the consent letter obtained from the participants before the researcher conducted the interviews. All the respondents were asked to carefully read the information sheet and the consent letter before confirming their participation in this research. During the final interviews, before giving informed written consent, the respondents were verbally briefed about the research topic, the researcher, the purpose, and the scope and process of the research.

3.3 Research procedures

3.3.1 Sampling strategy

The participants for this research were recruited using a purposeful, convenience and snowball sampling strategy. The researcher conducted interviews with marketing managers that she already knew or had been referred to (Creswell, 2013). This strategy was employed firstly because it provided access to the interviewees with the awareness and knowledge of the research questions so that they could communicate effectively (Insch & Stuart, 2015). Secondly, it helped build rapport and trust between the interviewer and the interviewees.
Thirdly, it is commonly used in exploratory research (Neuman, 2014) which is the nature of the current research study.

In terms of recruiting criteria, this research recruited respondents with a minimum of two years of work experience to reflect their seniority/autonomy in making marketing decisions (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004). The criteria were clearly stated in the information sheet for the participants, which was sent during the recruitment process. This was to ensure that “all the research participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied” (Creswell, 2013, p. 155). Moreover, because of the exploratory nature of this research, a maximum variation sampling strategy was used so that the research could capture the diverse variations (Carrington & Neville, 2016; Creswell, 2013) of the marketing managers from various industries and locations throughout New Zealand.

Following the sampling strategy mentioned above, the initial contacts with the respondents were made via email based on the researcher’s personal connections with marketing managers in New Zealand. The researcher emailed them and explained her need for research participants, then asked for their voluntary participation, and for an introduction to more respondents. After this stage, the researcher gathered a list of potential respondents, which consisted of ten people in Dunedin, four people in Christchurch, and fifteen people in Auckland.

The researcher decided to conduct interviews in Dunedin and Christchurch, mainly for budgetary reasons. Upon obtaining the ethical approval, she sent detailed information about the research to the potential participants in these two cities. The information included the information sheet for the participants and the consent forms. The potential participants were asked to read the information and confirm their participation via email. After this stage, the researcher scheduled the appointments with the participants and proceeded with the interviews. From the list of fourteen potential respondents, the final interviews included thirteen respondents because it was not possible to schedule a convenient time with one of them.

### 3.3.2 The sample size

Thirteen interviews were conducted for this research based on a consideration of the following factors. Firstly, this sample size is beyond the range recommended by scholars, such as Daniel (2018), Creswell (2014), Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), and Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005). Creswell (2014) found from his review of many qualitative research studies that the
number of participants in phenomenology research “typically range from three to ten” individuals (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). Likewise, Daniel (2018) recommends a sample size of up to ten for phenomenological research. After analysing the data from a phenomenological study of sixty in-depth interviews, Guest et al. (2006) proposed a sample size range involving between six and twelve individuals. Based on a review of the most common research design and techniques used by various qualitative methodologists, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) suggested that the sample size of phenomenological studies ranges from six to ten individuals.

Secondly, the sample size of thirteen interviews is beyond the sample size of eight participants in two phenomenological studies that the researcher reviewed for this thesis. To explore the influence of Buddhism on the entrepreneurs’ decisions in Nepal and Canada, Valliere (2008) employed a sample size of eight individuals. Marques (2010, p. 215) also employed a sample size of eight participants to study the phenomenon of “greater consciousness in the twenty-first-century workplace with Buddhism as its foundation”.

In qualitative research, sample size typically relies on the concept of saturation, “the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data” (Guest et al., 2006, p. 59). This means that the researchers stop collecting data “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). However, this concept receives some criticism. For example, while acknowledging the helpfulness of the saturation concept, Guest et al. (2006) are critical of its practical guidance for deciding the sample sizes before collecting the data, which they believe to be necessary for qualitative research. Creswell (2014) argues that saturation point is just one approach to answer the question of the sample size, which can be decided based on the qualitative design that is being used. Daniel (2018) states that saturation is unattainable in qualitative research and suggests applying maximum variation, which is one of the approaches employed in the current research. In this study, even though the researcher conducted thirteen interviews and did not attempt to attain saturation, she observed that she did not collect significantly new information after nine interviews.

3.3.3 The respondent profiles

As Table 1 shows, the respondents in this research included eleven female marketing managers and two male marketing managers from various industries, such as international education, student marketing, tourism and hospitality, and fast-moving-consumer-goods. Their organisations included multinational companies, public and private educational institutions,
and public service providers. All of them had at least two years’ work experience in marketing. The purpose of the pseudonym for each interview/respondent (e.g., RP1, RP2) is to anonymise the respondents, and it also indicates the order in which the interviews were conducted.

Table 1: Respondents’ profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Current role and industry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RP1</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Marketing Manager (Fast-Moving-Consumer-Goods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Marketing Coordinator (Trade, Tourism and Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP3</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Deputy Director (Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP4</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>International marketing manager (Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP5</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>International marketing manager (Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP6</td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>International marketing manager (Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP7</td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Marketing Manager (Tourism and Hospitality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP8</td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>International Marketing Director (Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP9</td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>International Marketing Manager (Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP10</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Consumer and Brand Marketing Advisor (Trade, Tourism and Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP11</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>International Marketing Manager (Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP12</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Marketing Professional (Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP13</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>International Marketing Manager (Education)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.4 Data collection and recording methods

This study collected the data via in-depth interviews using a one-on-one interview format, and an open-ended and semi-structured interviewing technique.
3.3.4.1 Face-to-face individual interviews

The face-to-face interview format was chosen because it provides visual cues, which enhance the quality of the conversation, encourage the interviewees to elaborate and clarify their opinions, and hence ensure the thoughtfulness and accuracy of their responses (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Moreover, it can provide greater effectiveness with complex issues (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003) and freedom for the interviewees to express their thoughts (O’Leary, 2004). This was especially important for the current research because it aimed to understand the participants’ beliefs and decision-making, which are complex by nature and different across individuals. While other interviewing options, such as focus groups, might also facilitate freedom in terms of opinion expression, individual interviews were preferred to avoid the “polarisation effect” (Neuman, 2014, p. 472), where respondents influence the responses of others. Moreover, individual interviews might help create a comfortable and trusting ambience for the participants (Sachet-Milliat, Baiada-Hireche, & Bourcier-Bequaert, 2017), because the confidentiality of information, such as their personal identities and their organisations, can be ensured (King & Horrocks, 2010). Other remote interview methods, such as telephone or video interviews, were avoided due to their potential risk of not providing the rich and nuanced information that is required by qualitative research (King & Horrocks, 2010). In addition, it is tiresome to keep the respondents on the telephone or video conference for more than thirty minutes, as they might become fatigued or impatient (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

3.3.4.2 Open-ended and semi-structured interviews

This research employed semi-structured interviews and open-ended interview questions. This approach helped the researcher to gather information from pre-defined questions and pursue newly developed ideas as the interviews progressed (O'Leary, 2004). Moreover, this approach exerted the least influence on respondents, thereby enabled them to freely express their perceptions in their own words, and offer their own stories (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). As such, rich information for the studied phenomenon could be obtained (O'Leary, 2004).

3.3.4.3 Pilot interviews

Following Kvale’s (2007) suggestion, the researcher conducted a number of pilot interviews before finalising the interview questions. The respondents of the pilot interviews were people with experience in making marketing decisions. They included the researcher’s personal
contacts and one senior staff member at the University of Otago Marketing department. Besides helping the researcher sharpen the interview guide, the pilot interviews also helped her practise the interview skills, and determine the appropriate length of each interview, which was expected to take between 30 and 45 minutes.

3.3.4.4 Final interviews

The final interviews were conducted between the 27th of November and 18th of January 2019. They lasted for an average duration of 48 minutes and were conducted at a time and location chosen by the interviewees. The practice of asking the research participants to choose their preferred time and location for interviews helps to create psychological comforts for them, minimise their tension, and ensure their responses are well developed (King & Horrocks, 2010). In addition, the researchers asked the participants to arrange quiet meeting rooms to ensure the privacy and continuity of the interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010). Moreover, because beliefs and decision-making are highly personal topics, an informal interview setting was attempted to establish rapport, trust, and a natural environment, so that the interviewees could be open and honest (O'Leary, 2004).

Following the recommendation from Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the researcher spent the first few minutes of the interviews ensuring the respondents had an overview of the interview process. Even though the information sheets and consent forms had been sent via email before the interviews, each interview started with the researcher repeating the key information about the research. This included the purpose of the interview, the assurance of confidentiality, and the interview protocol. The respondents were assured that there were no right or wrong answers, and they were not being judged. Ethics-related matters were reconfirmed, and the formal consent forms were obtained from the respondents before the interviews.

All the interviews were conducted in English and audio recorded with the permission of the respondents. An audio recorder was used for two reasons. Firstly, it enabled the researcher to focus on the interview. Secondly, the audio recordings were used for the purpose of the full transcription of the interviews afterwards. The researcher also made notes during the interviews so that she did not miss the important points as the interview discussions developed. All the respondents in this research appeared comfortable with the use of the audio recorder.
3.3.4.5 The questions asked

An interview guide (see Appendix C) was developed based on Bevan’s (2014) recommendations, in which the interview questions followed three stages, namely, contextualisation, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarifying the phenomenon. Firstly, the contextualising question enabled the participants to reconstruct and describe their experience against a context (Bevan, 2014). According to Bevan, it is important to ensure the participants are well placed within a context so that they can reconstruct and describe their experience with full of significant information. Thus, to provide all the interviews with a context for the interview questions, the researcher showed all of them a pre-printed text, which said:

“Marketers have responsibilities to a broad set of stakeholders, however maximising benefits for all the stakeholders is impossible. As such, marketers usually face ethical dilemmas. An ethical dilemma normally involves a compromise between marketers’ moral values and/or beliefs and the aim to increase profits for their companies. Accordingly, most marketing decisions made by marketers involve some degree of ethical judgment or ethical content. Indeed, making ethical decisions is a part of making marketing decisions.”

This led to the first question, which was about the role of the respondents’ personal beliefs in their marketing decisions. The purpose of this question was to warm up the interview discussions and it was not analysed.

Bevan (2014) recommends that the second phase of the interview, which is apprehending the phenomenon, should aim to get participants to describe the phenomenon. The questions in this phase should be developed so that the focus is on the central phenomenon of the research (Bevan, 2014). Accordingly, all the open-ended interview questions in this phase focused on obtaining respondents’ perceptions of karma, enabling the respondents to describe karma in their own words. To eliminate any potential miscommunication due to the different pronunciation of the term “karma”, the researcher pre-printed the word “KARMA” on a piece of paper and showed it to the respondents. The set of questions exploring the respondents’ perceptions of karma was to set the scene for the rest of the interviews, which was to explore the respondents’ perceptions of the influence of karmic beliefs on marketing decisions.

After the respondents had provided their own meaning of karma, they were shown a pre-printed sheet that outlined the essence of karma as encapsulated from the literature review, which said:
“Karma means ‘the results of our actions’, whatever we send out into the world will come back to us in one way or another. It may be today, tomorrow, or years from now, but it will happen and usually happens in a form which is different from the original action. In Western cultures, karma is evident in common sayings such as “what goes around comes around”, “you reap what you sow”, or the belief that sins lead to punishment and virtue leads to rewards.”

This led the participants to the third phase of the interview which involved asking questions to clarify the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). The focus of this phase was to explore the respondents’ perceptions of the role of karmic beliefs in influencing marketing managers’ decisions. Bevan (2014) suggests that all the interview questions in this phase should be from multiple perspectives so that the respondents can express different aspects of their opinions. Accordingly, to understand how marketing managers perceive the influence of karmic beliefs on decision-making, the researcher asked all the participants for their perceptions of: (i) the decisions made by marketing managers who believed in karma (“karmic orientated managers”); and (ii) the decisions made by marketing managers who did not believe in it (“non-karmic oriented managers”). All the respondents were asked to draw the difference in decisions made between managers who are karmic oriented compared to those who are not. The influence of karmic beliefs on marketing decisions could be drawn from comparing the respondents’ perceptions of the values and actions of the two groups of managers. With those respondents who claimed to be karmic oriented managers, the final part of the interviews focused on their reflection of how a belief in karma influenced their own marketing decisions. The data from these final questions were analysed throughout the results. This analysis helped further enhance the perceived differences in the decisions made between karmic orientated managers compared to non-karmic oriented managers.

### 3.3.5 Data analysis and interpretation

The data analysis and interpretation of this study was conducted utilising the qualitative analysis technique, which involved the inductive-deductive logic process (Creswell, 2013). Firstly, an inductive approach means that the analysis is data-driven: the emergent categories of the respondents’ opinions are drawn from the data itself rather than driven by the researcher’s theoretical interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis for the first two subsidiary questions of this research was undertaken by applying the six-phase thematic analysis process as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), namely: (i) Becoming familiar with
the data; (ii) Generating initial codes; (iii) Searching for themes; (iv) Reviewing themes; (v) Defining and naming themes; and (vi) Producing the report. Secondly, the data analysis for this research also used deductive thinking because the themes were built and checked constantly against the data (Creswell, 2013). This was particularly important to answer the third subsidiary question of this research where the researcher applied the conceptual categories of the H-V model to the analysis of the data (Neuman, 2014).

Following the six-phase thematic analysis process by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher firstly transcribed the interviews in full. All the interview scripts were sent back to the respondents so that they could ensure the scripts reflected what they said. Some respondents confirmed the scripts as they were; some respondents elaborated on and clarified the points they made in the interviews. Upon the confirmation from all of the respondents, the researcher cleared all the personal identifying information, then carefully reviewed the data, highlighted the relevant information, and noted the initial ideas for the codes and themes. After this, the researcher moved to the second phase of the analysis process where she manually carried out the coding. This stage involved coding features of the data systematically across the entire data set and collating the data relevant to each code. In the third phase of the analysis process, the researcher collated the codes into potential themes and gathered all of the data relevant to each theme by considering the relationships between the codes and the themes. In the fourth phase, all the themes were reviewed to ensure they worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. The fifth phase of this process involved an ongoing analysis process to refine each theme and ensure the data analysis reflected the overall story. The themes were then clearly defined and named. Producing the report was the final phase of the analysis process. The researcher selected vivid and compelling excerpts, analysed them, and related the analysis back to the research question and the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4 Strengths and limitations of the chosen method

A major advantage of the phenomenological design is that it helps produce rich information and vivid descriptions of individual perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2014). It also provides insights into people’s behaviours, and opportunities to obtain a broad scope of factors from the original research focus (Bloor & Wood, 2006). However, a disadvantage of this method is its limited ability for replication and generalisation (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Nonetheless, Creswell (2013) argues that the intent of qualitative research is to interpret the information, not to generalise the information. In the same vein, one might speculate that the
sample selected by a purposive sampling method does not represent the population (Neuman, 2014). However, as Insch and Stuart (2015) assert, a representative sample of the population is never the goal of an exploratory study, which is the nature of the current research.

Another disadvantage of phenomenology is its subjectivity of the data which may lead to difficulty in establishing reliability and validity (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Validity refers to the researcher’s employment of certain procedures to ensure the accuracy of the findings; reliability indicates the replicability and the consistency of the research’s processes and results across different researchers and different projects (Creswell, 2014). Based on the recommendation from Creswell (2014), multiple approaches were used to enhance the validity and reliability of this research. Firstly, the validity of the findings was ensured by a detailed description of each theme, and illustrative excerpts. Secondly, a consideration of the potential impact of the researcher’s personal background on collecting, analysing, and interpreting the data helped create an open and honest narrative. For example, the researcher ensured that the tone of the interviews did not show any bias. Thirdly, the reliability of this research was addressed through the documentation of the research procedures, which others can follow. Lastly, to ensure the accuracy of the data, the researcher checked each transcript twice after transcribing the interviews. Moreover, as mentioned in section 3.3.5, the researcher also followed up with the respondents to confirm that the scripts reflected what they said.
4. Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents the findings of the current research. A thematic analysis of the data obtained from the in-depth interviews suggested several themes concerning the respondents’ perceptions of karma and the perceived influence of karmic beliefs on decision-making in marketing. These themes will be outlined throughout this chapter, which is divided into two main sections. The aim of the first section is to understand the respondents’ perceptions of karma in terms of what it entailed (section 4.1). The aim of the second section is to understand the respondents’ perceptions of the influence of karmic beliefs on decision-making in marketing (section 4.2). This influence is drawn from comparing the respondents’ perceived differences in decisions made between the two groups, namely: karmic orientated managers and non-karmic oriented managers. The findings of how karma might inform the “belief system” construct of the H-V theory are presented across sections 4.1 and 4.2. The findings in this chapter will set the scene for Chapter 5 where their implications will be discussed. As presented in Chapter 3, the respondents in this study consisted of thirteen marketing managers with at least two years of work experience from various industries in New Zealand. It has also been mentioned across this thesis that the current study is exploratory in nature, and has been conducted to understand the influence of karmic beliefs on decision-making as perceived by marketing managers in a Western context.

4.1. Meaning of karma as perceived by marketing managers

All the respondents were familiar with the term karma. Not only could they articulate their perceptions of karma, they could also provide examples of karma in their daily, personal, and marketing contexts. Noticeably, without being asked, nine of the thirteen respondents stated that they themselves were karmic oriented managers. Five broad themes emerged from the respondents’ discussions on the meaning of karma, namely: (i) the nature of karma; (ii) karma as a belief system; (iii) karma as a personality trait representing people’s moral values; (iv) karma as an acquired belief from socialisation and enculturation; and (v) the probabilities of occurrence of consequences.

4.1.1. Nature of karma: what goes around comes around

When asked what karma meant to them, most of the respondents referred to karma as the result of one’s previous doing in terms of their actions. In the words of RP8:
“Karma is a result of something that you have done before.” (RP8)

According to the respondents, this meant good actions would lead to good outcomes in the future and vice versa for bad actions. As RP3 put it:

“I link good karma with the fact that if you do good things, good things will come back to you ... And bad karma [means that] ... if you're doing bad things, then those bad things will come back to you.” (RP3)

Many respondents, such as RP5 and RP6, reflected that karma was best described with the saying “what goes around comes around”. This was explained by RP2 and RP9:

“[Karma means] you get out what you put in.” (RP9)

“We often say karma is going to get you, so if you push something bad out into the world or you do something bad, it's going to come back and get you.” (RP2)

Another interpretation of karma by the respondents was that people should treat others as they would like to be treated. The respondents, RP5 for example, specified that karma meant “do unto others as you want them to do to you”, meaning that good karma would occur when an individual was genuinely nice to other people. RP5 believed that we could get good karma if we “donate a lot of time and effort to help people”. This view was shared by RP3 who perceived that good karma could be created “if you're kind to someone” such as “giving someone a parking chip because you're leaving a car park and you don't need it anymore”. In a similar fashion, RP11 reflected that:

“Karma to me is ... how you react to people and how you treat people as how you will be treated in return. So, if you are kind then ... karma will come back and treat you in kind.” (RP11)

In a marketing context, the respondents used varying examples to demonstrate their perceptions that good karma meant marketing managers should treat customers kindly. They believed that if marketers performed inappropriate marketing behaviours, they would face negative consequences. For instance, RP6 believed that marketers who made negative comments about competitors to sell their own products might face bad karma such as “a very difficult situation to market in”. Other examples were from RP8, RP9, and RP11, as below:
“Karma for a person who ... is willing to do anything to meet their sales target including lying [or] giving incorrect information is ... he might not be able to find the next job.” (RP8)

“If you do something bad in business ... karma comes back. ... It can be loneliness, ... failure, ... poverty, ... hunger; it can be a physical thing [like] a broken leg.” (RP9)

“When you're marketing [something] that may not be truthful ..., karma can come back ... and bite you, ... [like] you lose a job, you get a complaint, you have a bad reputation in the industry.” (RP11)

Meanwhile, a view expressed by most of the respondents was that karma would happen to the organisation, the community, and the city where the people who performed the actions were situated. This view could be seen from RP6’s excerpt:

“I always have a firm belief that ... if you're involved ... a negative style of marketing ..., then ... something may go financially wrong with ... [your] institutions.”

This view was shared by RP13 who suggested that:

“[Your action is] going to have ripple on effects in the future, maybe for you, or maybe ... for people around you. So, it's not always directly back to the individual but it may be for the wider world in which that individual is situated.” (RP13)

Several respondents talked about karma on a global scale where good or bad karma could happen to the planet due to people’s good or bad actions. As an example, the below extract suggested that people’s usage of plastic created bad karma for the world:

“On a global scale, if we talk about consumerism generally, ... there's a really big backlash against all of [the] plastic we're using in the world ... The bad karma ... that we push out there to the world is the way in which we produce plastic for everything, and now it's coming back in a bad way because our oceans are filled with this [plastic]. We and [the] wildlife are suffering because of this; ... this kind of consumerism is strangling, [and] ... making our planet a worse place.” (RP2)

4.1.2. Karma: a belief system

While discussing their perceptions of karma, a recurrent theme emerging amongst the interviewees was the origin of a belief in karma. For many respondents, karma was their own personal beliefs, which assisted them in interpreting things occurring around them. Noticeably, without being prompted, many respondents, including those who claimed themselves as karmic
oriented managers, said that they were not affiliated with a theological religion. They thought that people were not necessarily religious to hold a belief in karma. RP12 provided a detailed explanation of her karmic belief:

“I'm not religious. I don't ... believe in fate. ... I think ... [karma is] more [about] me looking for patterns to justify what I hope exists, because it's the type of world I would want to live in, it's a world where karma is a rule ... I definitely feel [that] for people like me, the lack of religion creates a void: we're left in a world where no one's in control, and no one's making sure [that] people are punished, ... [that] things work out well, and ... [that] we all are good. ... I think that ... the lack of religion ... means that some of us do like to fill up with ... belief systems [like karma] ... without the need for prayers and God and rules. ... [Karma] is still ... a belief system that is not scientifically proven, ... [but it] makes us feel better and gives us comfort.” (RP12)

Likewise, RP3 and RP5 had their own interpretation of their beliefs in karma, as they put it:

“I think of [karma] as energy, energy from the universe. ... I am quite practical, but I also have ... thoughts around spirituality.” (RP3)

“I wouldn't consider myself ... a religious person, but ... I would say that I ... have some beliefs in things ... [like] the concept of karma. ... My interpretation of karma would be ... the balance of something. So, there is one ripple effect that someone creates and then, that ripple effect comes back to affect them in some way, ... whether it's good or it's bad.” (RP5)

4.1.3. Karma: a personality trait representing people’s moral values

While elaborating on their perceptions of karma, several respondents stated that karma could come from inside each of them as a part of their nature, as RP2 and RP9 suggested:

“[Karma is in] our human nature, ... it's the way we think.” (RP2)

“Karma comes from our conscience, ... from within us I think.” (RP9)

From the view of RP9, karma was described as “a way of life” and a “standard for most people” to guide their moral behaviours. Likewise, RP2 and RP3 stated that karma was like their internal “moral compass” to tell them the right (or good) from the wrong (or bad). In their words, karma represented:

“the moral compass inside me going good bad good bad.” (RP3)
Additionally, when asked how to tell the good (or right) from the bad (or wrong), the respondents stated that it could be based on common moral values. For example, RP2 considered it was bad when “you cheat someone, or tell a lie, or behave badly to other people, ... [or] if you're not a very nice human being”. In the words of RP1, the right thing was:

“based on very basic moral values, that you shouldn’t lie, you shouldn't steal, you shouldn't violate people’s right.” (RP1)

The good (or right) versus the bad (or wrong) could also be based on the positive or negative impacts of the actions on other people. As reflected by RP3, the right thing “has had a positive effect for someone else”; while for RP5:

“Good is something that is not damaging anyone [in] anyway. It's ... to the benefit of someone ..., but not to the detriment ... to anyone ... else. Bad is anything that ... is detrimental to someone or something.” (RP5)

Furthermore, while elaborating on their perceptions of karma, the respondents compared a karmic effect with a reciprocal or causal effect. When asked how to distinguish these effects, the respondents suggested that karma was concerned with people-to-people interactions where certain levels of moral judgment were involved. For example, RP12 believed that:

“[Karma] would ... happen if ... [there is] a fairly significant act, maybe someone ... cheats on a partner or someone ... slights me.” (RP12)

Likewise, RP5 said that karmic effects would occur from the actions with “moral justice, like a riot, ... punish, and rehabilitation”. Whilst, RP13 said that karma would happen when people “make decisions ... that may impact or affect others”. In another example, RP12 reflected that:

“I remember there was one young guy ...; I put a lot of time into mentoring him and helping him. And then he set up a business that uses a technology that I don't use. ... [When] I asked him for his advice, ... his response was “you would have to pay me the fee ...”. And I just thought “Oh no that doesn’t sit morally with me because I gave a lot of time to you ...”. And so, I'm still waiting [because] that was four years ago. ... [Later] when something bad happens to him, I will say to myself “That's karma” because he did not act in a way that I felt ... [was] good, ... and he didn't pay back the good things, and therefore the bad things [would have] had to pay him back.” (RP12)
The respondents also suggested that a difference between a karmic effect and reciprocal or a causal effect was involvement of people’s sense or feeling. That is, a good or bad deed would depend on how people placed their “emotion” (RP2, RP11), “judgment” (RP8) and “intention” (RP9) toward the action. As noted by RP2 and RP11:

“Karma feels a lot more emotional in a way. Whereas that causal effect feels a lot more ... scientific ... [Karma happens if there is an] emotional response ..., a human response ..., an emotional reaction [to the action].” (RP2)

“I don’t know if I place karma on a physical object that doesn't have an emotional attachment; ... to me karma is ... emotive.” (RP11)

4.1.4. Karma: an acquired belief from socialisation and enculturation

While a few interviewees reflected that karmic beliefs might come from religious teaching, many believed that it came from people’s life experience. They stated that people learnt about karma from observing and reflecting on the nature of their own actions in relation to the consequent results. In their words, karma came from:

“experience. ... We think about karma in retrospect.” (RP2)

“[Karma is] what we learn. We learn good and bad.” (RP9)

RP2 used the English saying “once burnt twice shy” to explain this. In her view, one individual “might not believe in karma to start with” and “might send some bad karma out there without thinking about it coming back”. But after this individual “look[ed] at the result”, he realised that he could not “afford to do that again” because “something bad ... [had] come back to burn” him. It was then he learnt about karma and should “change the way that [he does] things”.

4.1.5. Karma: the probabilities of occurrence of consequences

Being asked when karma would occur, the respondents generally said that there would not be a finite time, but it would occur within this life. They believed that karma could be either immediate “at the time [when] you make decisions” (RP13) or could be in the medium or long term. As reflected by RP6 and RP12:

“I have a belief that [karma] will [occur] at some stage. ... I guess there is short term, medium term, [and] long-term karma.” (RP6)
In a marketing context, it was perceived that karma would occur once the consumers used the product or service. In the words of RP11:

“If you lie to your customers, [karma] could ... be instant. [For example], they're in the store [and] you tell them this ice-cream is amazing, [but, it is] horrible, ... cheap and nasty. ... [If] they taste it there, then [karma is] going to be instant. If you are selling them a vacation for example, and you tell them “this is what the hotel is going to look like, and this is the experience you're going to have”, [but the reality is] ... completely not like that, then ... [karma] will come back [to you] when they've ... experienced [that vacation]. So [the time that karma occurs] depends on the product or service that you're marketing or selling.” (RP11)

Having discovered how the respondents perceived karma to be, the interview discussions moved on to understand their perceptions about the influence of karmic beliefs on marketing managers’ decision-making. The next section outlines these findings.

4.2. Marketing decisions made by karmic orientated and non-karmic oriented managers

Generally, the respondents in this research perceived marketing decisions made by karmic orientated managers and those made by non-karmic oriented managers to be distinct. Noticeably, while all the respondents were asked for their perceptions of the decisions made by karmic orientated managers, most of them switched to talking about their own decisions. This was because nine of thirteen respondents claimed to be karmic orientated managers as mentioned before. Thus, while obtaining the respondents’ perceived differences in decisions made between the two groups of managers to draw the perceived influence of karmic beliefs on marketing behaviours in general, this study gained further insights into how karmic beliefs influenced the respondent’s own decisions. As mentioned in section 3.3.4.5, these insights were analysed throughout the results to further enhance the differences in decisions made between karmic orientated managers and non-karmic oriented managers.

Seven broad themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data suggesting the differences in the decisions made by the two groups of managers. These themes include: (i) the ethicality versus unethicallity in decision-making; (ii) the promotion of contentious versus non-contentious products; (iii) the short-term versus long-term orientation of marketing decisions;
(iv) the focus on materialism versus non-materialism of decision outcomes; (v) the inward versus outward orientation while considering the importance of the stakeholders involved in the decisions; (vi) the undesirability of bad consequences; and (vii) the conservatism versus creativity and innovation of marketing decisions.

4.2.1. The ethicality versus unethicality in decision-making

When asked to describe the marketing decisions made by karmic oriented and non-karmic oriented managers, the respondents talked about karma as being relevant to the ethical frameworks that marketing managers hold. Overall, the respondents perceived that marketing decisions made by the former were more ethical than those made by the latter. Nonetheless, many respondents emphasised that they did not think of non-karmic oriented managers as entirely unethical people.

Various perspectives were expressed concerning the dimensions of the ethical decisions made by the two groups of managers in terms of honesty, authenticity, and fairness. A general perception of the respondents was that marketing messages made by karmic oriented managers would be more honest, trustworthy, and realistic. Whereas, those made by non-karmic oriented managers were perceived as more deceitful, dishonest, shady and ruthless. According to the respondents, a dilemma faced by marketing managers was whether to base their marketing messages on facts or creative flair. As RP3 exemplified, marketing managers usually must decide their position on a “continuum between absolute truth and absolute makeup”. In the opinion of the respondents, such as RP9, marketing messages that delivered fact-based information were important to provide consumers with a realistic expectation, while creative stories were equally important because they were more attractive and impressive to the consumers. In such a situation, karmic oriented managers were perceived to create marketing messages that were more ethical. For example, RP2 suggested that the marketing pitch produced by karmic oriented managers would neither be “stylized” to portray unreal experiences nor “air-brushed” to be different from reality. In the same vein, RP3 offered a description of karmic oriented managers:

“They’re probably less likely to temper the marketing to ensure that it is honest and trustworthy and realistic.” (RP3)
Additionally, the respondents suggested that marketing messages produced by karmic oriented managers would be more authentic, focusing on the strengths of their own products and what they could offer the consumers. For example, RP2 and RP9 suggested that these managers would try to produce marketing messages that “resonated” with consumers’ wants and needs. This view was echoed by RP6 who perceived that marketing messages designed by karmic oriented managers would only mention their own products’ propositions, such as what they could “offer” their consumers; what was “great” about their products; and why their products were the “right choice” for the consumers. As RP9 elaborated:

“I think karma does influence us ... in the way that it comes across [our approach which] ... is being honest, managing people's expectations, asking what's important to the clients, asking them what they are looking for, ..., and knowing whether we tick that box or not.” (RP9)

By contrast, non-karmic oriented managers were perceived as “more likely to have less ethical or moral considerations in their decision-making process” (RP13). Marketing messages produced by this group of managers might include a “beautiful verbal description” (RP9) that might overwhelm the facts, and hence might be misleading or over-promising. While talking about this group of managers, the respondents “described them as more ruthless” (RP12). They were perceived to get the consumers to buy their products “at any cost” (RP9), such as “lying” (RP8) to the consumers or not disclosing the full truth about the product to the consumers. In the words of the respondents:

“[They] would be deceitful. ... They can lie. ... [They are] greedy, ... and ... possibly dishonest. [They use] shady practices, ... [and] underhand practices.” (RP9)

“They will just do what[ever], ... no matter if they're being dishonest, or if there may be some fabrication.” (RP11)

Moreover, non-karmic oriented managers were perceived to take a “negative marketing” (RP6) approach which involved a “direct comparison” (RP6) between their own products and those of their competitors, or talking negatively about their competitors, or focusing on competitors’ weaknesses. In the opinion of RP6, this group of managers would say why the consumers should not choose competitors’ products instead of saying why consumers should choose their products. Likewise, RP11 suggested that non-karmic oriented managers might “choose to market their products by discrediting the competitors' products”.

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4.2.2. The promotion of contentious versus non-contentious products

The respondents believed that a belief in karma was influential with respect to their choice of the type of industry where they wanted to work in. As RP11 reflected, the question of which industry to join could be the first marketing decision for many marketers. In their words:

“I think if you really do believe in karma then it will also influence which industries you work in and your choices of career path.” (RP11)

 “[A karmic belief] influences my decisions. ... It influences the jobs I've taken. It influences the organisations I've worked for.” (RP12)

According to the respondents, karmic oriented managers might not promote contentious products or work for morally questionable companies. For example, RP5 thought that these managers would promote a product that “would almost sell itself” and “wouldn't work for a company ... that they felt [was] morally wrong”. In her words:

“... things like tobacco, ... things that were potentially illegal, like firearms, anything that is detrimental to society or [to the] community, so it could even be ... sweet food [like] Dunkin' Donuts, ... or gambling, ... or ... a TAB ... I think people who believe in karma would probably think negatively [about] all of those industries ... [and they] ... would not want to be involved”. (RP5)

Meanwhile, RP11 contended that karmic oriented managers would make a “career choice to work for companies that will only have positive actions”. Similarly, RP12 said that karmic oriented managers would be more inclined to work for non-profit organisations:

“[They] tend to be ... working in industries where there’s more heart and ... more about people. They will often work in the voluntary sector. ... They won't always be as comfortable in profit-driven businesses.” (RP12)

Some respondents perceived that this group of managers would be selling products and services that were “not just good for people but [also] good for the planet” (RP10). In RP10’s opinion, karmic oriented managers would not work for a two-dollar shop because she believed that the world did not need a lot of cheap toys. Moreover, many respondents emphasised that karmic oriented managers would not “work for tobacco companies” (RP3), or gambling and poker machines, casinos, and firearm products. RP11, a karmic oriented manager, suggested that:
“I will never work for a tobacco company because I don't believe that product is right or healthy.” (RP11)

According to RP3, a reason she did not choose to promote contentious products was because she did not want her children to consume these products. As she put it:

“I wouldn't be happy working with ... a company that makes alcoholic products. ... No. I have a daughter; she's going to be entering [the drinking] age.” (RP3)

On the other hand, the respondents perceived that non-karmic oriented managers would not limit their career choice to any type of product or industry. For instance, in RP5’s opinion, non-karmic oriented managers would disregard the contentiousness of the product in their decisions because they thought that contentious products still had a demand from consumers. As such, their decisions would be more concerned with employment resulting in “great remuneration”. In her words:

“I think [for] someone who didn't believe in karma, sure, you've got a great job [with] a company that's going to pay you a lot of money, and ... you've got people out there who are gonna use your product, so, get in there.” (RP5)

4.2.3. The short-term versus long-term orientation of marketing decisions

The themes of long-term orientation and sustainability recurred throughout the discussions on the respondents’ perceptions of decisions made by karmic oriented marketing managers. Overall, the respondents were unanimous in the view that karmic oriented managers were future investors who made marketing decisions for long-term and sustainable outcomes. The respondents described decisions made by this group of managers as “for the long game” (RP9), for “the whole cycle” (RP10), and “based on the idea that those decisions will have implications for the future” (RP13). RP11 used the term “longevity” to describe the marketing decisions made by karmic oriented managers, because, in her opinion, longevity implied “high-value relationships” and “sustainable growth” for the business. RP11 emphasised her belief in longevity because she understood the importance of relationships and reputation in New Zealand. Like RP11, RP2 believed that in New Zealand, long-term relationships and sustainable values, such as integrity and credibility, were very important. Both RP2 and RP11 believed that if a marketing decision was “purely result-driven” (RP11) and/or “just a short-term win at all costs” (RP11), there would not be long-term benefits for the business.
By contrast, non-karmic oriented managers were perceived as immediate reward seekers whose decisions were based on short-term, transactional, and instant outcomes. Across the respondents, the terms “instant gratification” and “instant rewards” were mentioned multiple times. For instance, RP2 stated that these managers were more concerned with the “instant gratification” which referred to “short-term KPIs” (Key Performance Indexes) or “sales targets” that they had to deliver. Similarly, RP9 explained that this group of managers would not be afraid of any negative repercussions resulting from their actions and, therefore, would do anything for “instant rewards”. In addition, the respondents suggested that meeting sales targets was the most important factor considered in non-karmic oriented managers’ decisions. From their perspectives, this group of managers would come to their decisions “in a more transactional approach”, and the decisions would be “more driven by short-term objectives” (RP13). Moreover, they would make decisions based on “how fast” the Return On Investments (ROIs) would come. The excerpt from RP9 best represents these views from the respondents:

“Instant gratification would be more prevalent in somebody who doesn't believe in karma. It's the now, it's the immediate, it's reap[ing] the rewards right now as opposed to believing that doing the right thing will eventually pay off. ... [They are about] instant or fast return. If you don't believe in karma, you don't believe in the long game, why would you wait? So, it's about making the fast buck. ... It's the instant gratification, it's the instant reward, it's the instant return on investment.” (RP9)

As explained by RP11, short-term or sales-driven marketing campaigns might damage the relationships and credibility with consumers, leading to strong consumer resistance. This, in turn, implied that there would not be sustainable growth or long-term benefits for the business.

4.2.4. The focus on materialism versus non-materialism of decision outcomes

The respondents believed that there were differences in the decision outcomes that karmic oriented managers focused on compared to non-karmic oriented managers. It was generally perceived that non-karmic oriented managers would focus more on materialistic outcomes with tangible measurements, such as numeric sales targets, monetary profits, ROIs, and KPIs. According to the respondents, this group of managers would be “making decisions based on sales” (RP10) and “on getting the greatest revenue for the company” (RP11), and “more bottom-line focused” (RP12). In the words of the respondents:

“[They will] be like ‘Hey we sold 100 million ... so that's fine, I got my sales bonus, my marketing bonus, and the company's happy, and I have a new office’. ” (RP3)
“[Their consideration is] purely monetary. ... Everything would be around money and ... the rewards, [and] ... the return in terms of money, status.” (RP9)

“Their decisions are not people focused, [but] are more results driven.” (RP10)

These views were shared by RP6 who stated that this group of managers would only be looking at the “goals ... set by the company and the rewards” that they could achieve. Likewise, RP1 and RP13 suggested that for non-karmic oriented managers, driving the “most profitable” outcomes and meeting “sales targets” were the most important factors they considered in their decisions. RP13 added that non-karmic oriented managers would try to meet their “targets” as quickly as they could, so that firstly they could be paid, and secondly, they could improve their chance of getting a promotion which would bring them “more money”. According to RP13, their decisions would be in “a colder-type approach”, because they were “not concerned by the flow on effects ... of their interactions with other people”.

Concerning karmic oriented managers, the respondents generally demonstrated that their decisions were driving “not just the monetary value” (RP2) but also non-materialistic outcomes. Non-materialistic outcomes were those that were intangible, such as “relationship values” and “emotional values” (RP2). For instance, RP12 who was a karmic oriented manager said that her belief in karma drove her to create more work that she was proud of than the work that made her rich. Another karmic oriented manager, RP10, said that she would use a local supplier even though they were more expensive compared to the other non-local suppliers. She reflected that a belief in karma drove her to focus on the human-to-human perspective. She believed that accessing local suppliers was important for the local community. In her words, the decisions made by karmic oriented managers would be “less based on traditional KPIs, ... monetary KPIs, ... return on investment” and would show “more responsibility for other people, ... more empathy”. Her view was shared by RP13 who believed that the group of karmic oriented managers would be:

“considering the thoughts and feelings of other people. ... They are more in touch with what's [happening to] other humans.” (RP13)

Another non-materialistic outcome that karmic oriented managers considered was “personal relationships” (RP10) and/or “genuine relationships with stakeholders” (RP11). For example, RP10 thought that karmic oriented managers would be more inclined to “relationship marketing” and they would go to a supplier because that “supplier is always friendly, helpful”
For them, exchange values were not only about the “economic gain” (RP2), but also about “nurturing ... interpersonal relations” (RP13) and “social, cultural gain” (RP2). The respondents believed that karmic oriented managers would be concerned about “maintaining a relationship ... because they know ... that by creating goodwill in whatever interaction they're having will have flow-on effects for their marketing opportunities in the future” (RP13). Along the same lines, RP2 emphasised the importance of relationships as well as social and cultural gain for a country like New Zealand:

“We are a little country down [at] the end of the globe, and we survive because we need to be globally connected in many ways, ... and ... we need to thrive not just on money, but on having relationships with people, and [on] being a part of the world, and understanding different cultures ... so that we can be part of it.” (RP2)

4.2.5. The outward versus inward orientation when considering involved stakeholders

When asked how karmic oriented managers would evaluate the importance of stakeholders when making decisions, the respondents generally reflected that this group of managers would consider all of the stakeholders, and their decisions were described as “more focused on everybody” (RP3) and/or “in favour of all stakeholders” (RP8). As RP5 reflected:

“I think someone who believes in ... karma would go through a process where it is very much evaluating every stakeholders' opinion of a particular campaign ... they were doing.” (RP5)

RP8 added that karmic oriented managers could make “a compromised decision” for all involved stakeholders, because they were “trying to make everyone happy”, which was “very important for the person who believes in karma”. Moreover, the stakeholders considered in decisions of karmic oriented managers were thought to be more holistic. These stakeholders would include not only the companies, shareholders, consumers, and suppliers, but also the community, the city, the country and even the planet. RP8 perceived that a karmic oriented manager would “make sure that ... her actions ... do good ... for all the stakeholders”, including her organisation, her organisation’s business partners, “and wider stakeholders, for example, [the] people in the city”. Her view was shared by RP10:

“A person who believes in karma has a much more holistic view of their place, ... of the environment and their world as well.” (RP10)
Additionally, the respondents demonstrated that karmic oriented managers would be more “client-focused” (RP9). While RP3 suggested that “anyone who does believe in karma would say that the client is the most important”, RP10 said that the most important stakeholders these managers considered in their decisions had to do with “customer satisfaction”. According to the respondents, it was important for karmic oriented managers that the end-consumers’ satisfaction was ensured, and that the consumers were well informed about the products and services they were going to buy.

On the other hand, non-karmic oriented managers were perceived to hold an individualistic philosophy. The respondents suggested that these managers’ “decisions are ... for their own self-purposes” (RP10), their “self-interests” (RP13), and “not for the sake of other people” (RP1) nor for the “customer satisfaction” (RP10). Moreover, the respondents perceived that non-karmic oriented managers would only consider a limited number of stakeholders such as the companies that they represented, the shareholders, and/or those who could help them achieve their personal goals. In their words:

“[Their] overriding priority is purely ... the company or institution they're representing. ... Their focus would not be on [the] satisfaction of the end-consumer.” (RP6)

In addition, the respondents perceived that the marketing decisions that this group of managers made “might just make one or two stakeholders happy” (RP8). According to them, the stakeholders being considered important in non-karmic oriented managers’ decisions was limited to those “with the largest amount of money, the most powerful positions, the biggest voice” (RP2). RP11 added that these managers would use their stakeholders for their own goals rather than building a “two-way street” relationship. From the respondents’ view, it was because non-karmic oriented managers “are worried about their own performance and their own KPIs, and what they can get out of that” (RP10), such as “being promoted” (RP1). As RP11 put it:

“I think [they] probably identify the stakeholders which should give them the biggest return on investment, and actively target those.” (RP11)

Additionally, as RP13 reflected, non-karmic oriented managers were “looking after themselves first, rather than being concerned with the wider groups ..., or ... the wider community, or the wider stakeholders ..., [or the] business network” that they were part of.
4.2.6. The undesirability of bad consequences

While asked about the influence of karmic beliefs on their own marketing decisions, most of the respondents reflected that this belief prevented them from engaging in bad behaviours due to their fear of future bad karma. For many of them, doing good was to avoid bad things that might happen to them in the future. For example, RP3 did not want to have “a disgruntled client” which she considered “a really bad thing … to have”. Other respondents, such as RP1 and RP9, reflected that they would avoid negative marketing actions because they did not want the “miserable” (RP1) incidents to affect their lives. In the words of RP9:

“Nobody wants the bad stuff. So, if you truly believe that putting [the] good out there will give you [the] good, then the fear of the bad is what will drive you. … [Karma] protects myself … from doing something that I later regret [like] … revenge [or] negative things.” (RP9)

4.2.7. Conservatism versus creativity and innovation

The respondents’ discussions about the decisions made by karmic and non-karmic oriented managers revealed the various alternatives that these two groups of managers were perceived to take. Generally, the respondent believed that non-karmic oriented managers could take more options while making decisions because “they would do anything to be able to do their job” (RP8) and they “don't care about the result of their actions” (RP8). The respondents thought that non-karmic oriented managers might “take riskier decisions” (RP12) and “could be more willing to do something a bit outside the box” (RP5). In addition, non-karmic oriented managers were described as “quite creative” and “would do something quite different” (RP8). As explained by the respondents, characteristics such as creativity, innovation, and risk-taking were important for marketers. This was because they needed to keep up with consumers who were evolving, and/or with the continuously changing consumer demand, which might lead to better outcomes as high risk was perceived to come with high return.

On the other hand, the respondents believed that karmic oriented managers would adhere more to guidelines and would be unlikely to take to options that had not been done before. As explained by RP5 and RP8, it was because karmic oriented managers were afraid that their outcomes could face the risks of negative consequences. They also had “to make sure that they … reduce [the] … conflict between the stakeholders … and [the] clients, customers” (RP3). RP5 gave a detailed explanation:
“I think someone who believes in ... karma would ... [be] extra aware of perceptions of messages or images or branding that could be perceived or taken [from their campaign]. ... Because you might have some really creative campaigns ... that might have three million hits on YouTube or billboard news...., but I think you'd want to take into account the potential perceptions [or] negative perceptions of a campaign that you were putting together. So, any kind of ramification ... [should] be considered, [like] sexist or racist, or maybe someone reads it and has an unintended message or something.” (RP5)

Accordingly, karmic oriented managers were perceived as “more risk-averse” (RP5), “more conservative” (RP8), and “less creative” (RP8). In the words of the respondents:

“[They] can't be creative and [can't] think outside of the box and [can't] do something that no one has done before, because [they are] possibly afraid the outcomes could've gone bad... [They] would be more conservative ... and probably would follow the guidelines.” (RP8)

“[As a karma believer, my] marketing decisions ... are not always very off the wall, innovative, and probably not very risky.” (RP12)

Nonetheless, the respondents emphasised that they did not think of karmic oriented managers as entirely non-creative people. From their perspective, the differences in decisions made by karmic oriented and non-karmic oriented managers would be observable in hazy marketing situations, such as to which extent marketers would use sex appeal, religion or ethnicity in their advertisements. In the words of RP5:

“So, say ... you have some ideas of [running] ... a campaign or ... [an] advert, ... and there's something that's really creative and really cool and really fun. But there is a chance that people might perceive it as being sexist, or ... people think Oh was that aimed at ... ethnicity, or something like that ... I mean ... if there's something that could be flipped, ... someone who believes in karma ... might go for a safer option... Whereas, someone ... who doesn't believe in karma [might think] that [it] could be amazing even though there's a slight bit of risk. [They might think] that the perception is not what we want, but ... we [could] get a lot more reach, ... a lot more engagement. [So,] they would potentially be more willing to take the risk than someone who was worried that any negative impact would come back to bite them.” (RP5)

The findings presented in this chapter are discussed in Chapter 5 where they are linked to the literature that has been reviewed in Chapter 2, which sets the foundation for the conclusions and implications of this research.
5. Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the current research was to explore the influence of a belief in karma on decision-making as perceived by marketing managers in a Western context. This was accomplished by (i) understanding the meaning of karma as perceived by marketing managers; (ii) comparing marketing managers’ perceived differences in decisions made between karmic orientated and non-karmic oriented managers; and (iii) understanding how a belief in karma could inform the “belief system” construct of the H-V theory.

This study has found that a belief in karma exists amongst marketing managers in a Western context, and it is perceived to influence decision-making in marketing. Without a prompt, marketing managers in this study claimed to be karmic oriented managers. Of note, marketing managers in this study only read the definition of karma after they had provided their own meaning of karma. Moreover, while aiming to obtain marketing managers’ perceptions of the influence of karmic beliefs on marketing behaviours in general, this study has gained further insights into their personal accounts of how karmic beliefs influence their own behaviours. All marketing managers in this study were asked for their perceptions of decisions made by others; however, most of them talked about their own behaviours being influenced by their karmic beliefs. The findings from this study have suggested that marketing managers’ karmic beliefs affect their behaviours in both personal and professional contexts. The way marketing managers perceive karma to operate affects not only various aspects in their own decision-making but also their perceptions of decisions made by others.

This chapter starts with a contribution of this research (section 5.1), which leads to a detailed discussion of how the findings of this study fit into the framework of the H-V model (sections 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3, and 5.1.4). Specifically, sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 discuss the findings supporting the influence of karmic beliefs on marketers’ belief systems and ethical behaviours, respectively. Sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 discuss the findings supporting the influence of karmic beliefs on marketers’ deontological and teleological evaluation, respectively. At the same time, these sections discuss how the findings of this study fit with other literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This chapter also outlines the implications of the findings (section 5.2), the limitations of the study (section 5.3), recommendations for further research (section 5.4), and the conclusion from the current study (section 5.5).
At the outset, it is important to reiterate that the framework of the H-V model was applied to the interpretation of the data (as mentioned in section 3.3.5). The H-V model does not suggest a linear information-processing rule, as there is a high degree of interaction across, and interdependence amongst, the constructs of the model (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). For example, “ethical behaviour” is influenced by either “deontological evaluation” or “teleological evaluation”, both of which are influenced by “perceived ethical problem”, which is influenced by “belief system” (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). The findings from this study have suggested a similar pattern in the perceived influences of karmic beliefs on marketing decisions. For instance, a belief in karma was found to influence the ethicality in decision-making via influencing karmic oriented managers’ recognition of an ethical issue, which influences their deontological and teleological evaluation via influencing their perceived alternatives and/or perceived consequences. This explains a certain level of interaction between the perceived influences of karmic beliefs on various aspects of marketing managers’ decisions, with one aspect triggering or compounding the others.

### 5.1. Contribution of this research

This study contributes to the literature on ethical decision-making in marketing by suggesting that a belief in karma can drive marketing managers’ ethical decisions. Understanding personal factors that affect marketing managers’ ethical decisions is important because it helps to increase knowledge of how dilemmas are navigated. This, in turn, contributes to making more ethical decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1993, 2006), which benefit both organisations and society (Ferrell et al., 2013). Despite rich literature on the influence of personal beliefs on ethical behaviours, the influence of karmic beliefs on marketing managers’ decision-making has not yet been explored. This study reinforces the role of personal beliefs on marketing managers’ ethical behaviours, which are of importance for managers who seek to improve ethical marketing behaviours in their organisations (Bass et al., 1999; Bass & Tomkiewicz, 2002).

This study has explored the constitution of karmic belief systems that drive marketing managers’ ethical perceptions and behaviours in a Western context. Previous research has typically examined the role of karma in relation to ethical behaviours of consumers (e.g., Choudhury, 2014; Kopalle et al., 2010; Kulow & Kramer, 2016; Mathras et al., 2016; Pace, 2013) and salespeople (e.g., Singh & Singh, 2012, 2015). The findings from previous research have been mainly from an Eastern religious perspective (e.g., Choudhury, 2014; Kopalle et al., 2010; Low, 2013; Mathras et al., 2016; Pace, 2013), or in an Eastern culture (e.g., Choudhury,
This study has found that karmic oriented managers are perceived to make decisions that are more ethical; more people oriented and/or less materialistically oriented; and that emphasise long-term and sustainable benefits. Their decisions are more likely to consider the benefits of, and relationships with, wider stakeholders, including customers, society, and the planet. This is because they evaluate the long-term consequences of their decisions, instead of focusing on short-term profits and their own individual benefits. It is also due to their fear of future bad karma, which they believe to be observable within this life.

The empirical findings from this study extend previous conceptual studies (e.g., Low, 2013; Singh & Singh, 2012) by suggesting that karmic beliefs may have ethical implications for marketing practices. As mentioned previously, Singh and Singh (2012) called for future qualitative research to test their conceptual proposition that karmic beliefs lead to more ethical behaviours outside the sales context. Low (2013) recommended studying the link between Buddhist philosophies, including karmic beliefs, with marketing disciplines. Their studies are in an Eastern religious context and have not been empirically examined previously. Taken together, this study helps extend the current literature by suggesting that a belief in karma can contribute to more ethical marketing behaviours across contexts (e.g. both consumers and marketing managers; both in Eastern and Western cultures). Therefore, integrating karmic principles into marketing practices can help build better marketing (Low, 2013).

Besides contributing to the literature on marketing ethics, these findings broadly extend the work of previous studies on the role of karmic beliefs within the realm of religion and a general business and/or management context. Previous studies have found that a belief in karma influences ethical behaviours of religious entrepreneurs, businesspersons and leaders (e.g. Ananthram & Chan, 2016; Marques, 2012; Valliere, 2008). Though preliminary, these findings suggest that a belief in karma can contribute to ethical decisions made by managers and/or leaders of organisations, regardless of a religious context. Such decisions have significant importance in the success of organisations upon which society is dependent (Bass & Tomkiewicz, 2002).

This study is one of the first to examine the H-V model regarding marketing managers’ karmic belief systems. Its findings help extend the current constitution of the “belief system” of the model by adding a belief in karma. As discussed before, this model speculates that marketers’ belief systems influence their ethical decisions but it does not define these beliefs explicitly
Previous research has not yet examined karmic belief systems of marketing managers through the lens of the H-V theory. This study has indicated that karma represents marketing managers’ personal beliefs, which influence the way they navigate through dilemmas to make ethical decisions. Various aspects of the navigation process fit into the framework of the H-V model, as we will see in later sections. Thus, the present study has revealed new knowledge that karma is a specific belief system that can be added into the H-V model to explain ethical perceptions and behaviours of marketing managers in a Western context. For organisations that employ person-organisation fit tools, such as psychographic profiles or organisational culture profile, to improve organisational outcomes (Charles A. O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Mirvis & Kanter, 1991), this finding can be of importance as evidence that they might want to include karmic beliefs into these tools.

5.1.1. The perceived influence of karma on marketing managers’ belief systems

This study suggests that karma influences how marketing managers perceive the outcome of their deeds: a good outcome will be the result of a positively skewed ethical decision (section 4.1). This is consistent with the literature which suggests that karma is a belief system “centred on the expectation of ethical causation” (White et al., 2018, p. 1). These findings demonstrate that a belief in karma has a role in influencing marketing managers’ recognition of an ethical issue. Along a similar line, the H-V model suggests that marketing managers’ belief systems influence their “perceived ethical problem”, which is a situation where marketing managers perceive there to be ethical content (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). Thus, these findings support the H-V model by suggesting that a belief in karma influence the “perceived ethical problem” of marketing managers.

The current study also found that the way marketing managers perceive karma to operate affects their perceptions of various aspects of decision-making (section 4.2). These aspects can fit into the constructs of the H-V model. For example, what alternative actions they might take (“perceived alternatives”); what are considered right/good versus bad/wrong actions (“deontological norms”); what is the probability that the consequences will occur (“probabilities of consequences”); whether they desire the consequences or not (“desirability of consequences”); how important is each involved stakeholder (“importance of stakeholders”) (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). These findings demonstrate that a belief in karma has a role in influencing marketing managers’ perceptions of how ethical dilemmas are navigated. As reviewed in section 2.3.1, the H-V model argues that to the extent that a marketer believes this
is how the world actually works, this belief will guide their behaviours by influencing the constructs of the model (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). This explains why the decisions made between karmic oriented managers and non-karmic oriented managers were perceived to be distinct as discussed throughout this chapter.

The H-V model defines marketing managers’ “belief systems” as how they believe the world works, which guides their ethical behaviours (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). Taken together, the findings from this study suggest that karma is a belief system that influences marketing managers’ interpretation of the correlation between a good (or bad) action in the present and a good (or bad) karma in the future. This belief influences their own marketing decisions and their perceptions of karmic oriented managers making more ethical decisions as compared to non-karmic oriented managers. This suggests that a karmic belief may be perceived to explain the differences in ethical decisions made by marketing managers. Therefore, this study supports adding karma into the “belief system” of the H-V model.

5.1.2. The perceived influence of karmic beliefs on ethical behaviours

A deeper look into the findings of this study suggested that a belief in karma would motivate marketing managers to market their products by being honest, realistic, and authentic about their own products, rather than being dishonest, ruthless, and shady in their marketing campaigns or discrediting their competitors (section 4.2.1). This is because marketing managers in this study are fearful of future bad karma (section 4.2.6), consistent with Marques (2012) who conceptually proposes that karma might prevent workers from engaging in negative behaviours to avoid being victimised by their own wrongdoings. These findings provide further evidence to support Low (2013) who conceptually argues that there would be no need to gain market share at the cost of pushing the competitors out when considering karmic beliefs. In addition, these findings support a previous view from Abeydeera et al. (2016) who suggested that, within a general business context, a belief in karma might foster cooperation across the stakeholders rather than competition, leading to more rational decisions that benefit all stakeholders including society as a whole.

Previous empirical research has shown that honesty is a personal value that explains the ethical variances of marketing managers’ decisions (Akaah & Lund, 1994). The findings from this study suggest that a belief in karma is perceived to influence the honesty of marketing managers, which explains the perceived differences in ethicality of the decisions made between
karmic and non-karmic oriented managers as discussed earlier. In view of what has been discussed so far, this study suggests that companies adopting karmic philosophy would be more likely to produce more ethical marketing campaigns, and more likely to compete based on factors such as product quality and customer service rather than on controversial practices such as price war or bashing competitors. This ultimately creates value not only for companies and consumers but also for the business community in general (Low, 2013).

5.1.3. The perceived influence of karmic beliefs on deontological evaluation

In line with the H-V model (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006), this study has found that a belief in karma is perceived to influence the “deontological evaluation” process of marketing managers via influencing their “deontological norms” and “perceived alternatives”.

5.1.3.1. Deontological norms

This study suggests that karma could be a personality trait representing marketing managers’ moral values (section 4.1.3). Karmic oriented managers are perceived as more likely to conform to guidelines (section 4.2.7), avoiding practices such as dishonest advertising, and deceitful or ruthless marketing (section 4.2.1). These findings are in line with the “deontological norms” of the H-V model, defined as marketers’ personal values or rules of moral behaviours (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). These findings demonstrate that a belief in karma can influence marketers’ deontological norms, and ultimately influences their ethical decisions. This conforms to the expectation that marketing managers’ belief system influences their ethical behaviours via influencing their deontological norms and deontological evaluation, as informed by the H-V model (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006).

In addition to the findings that karmic beliefs can influence marketers’ ethical decisions and deontological norms, this study has found that karmic beliefs may drive decisions to be more relationship-based and/or people-oriented (section 4.2.4). This is because marketing managers in this study believed that the relationships, especially with customers, suppliers and wider stakeholders, are important for karmic oriented managers (section 4.2.5). As explained by marketing managers in this study, relationships are built based on factors such as integrity and credibility (section 4.2.3). This explains why karmic oriented managers were perceived to make more ethical decisions as presented earlier. Therefore, the findings from this research suggest
that integrating karmic principles into organisational practice might motivate marketing managers to be more ethical in terms of adhering to guidelines and/or code of conduct.

Previous empirical research has shown that machiavellianism negatively affects ethical behaviours of marketing managers (Bass et al., 1999; Singhapakdi & Vitell, 1990, 1991; Singhapakdi et al., 2013) because it reflects their manipulative and unethical strategy to deal with people (Hunt & Chonko, 1984). Moreover, marketing managers with low machiavellianism tend to have higher deontological norms, hence are more ethical with regard to relevant guidelines, values, or rules of behaviours (Singhapakdi & Vitell, 1991). Taken together, the findings from this research and from previous research raise a question regarding the correlation between a belief in karma with deontological norms and machiavellianism, which could be a potential area for future quantitative research. This further understanding would provide more confidence for companies to adopt karmic philosophies in their organisations.

Unexpectedly, while finding that karmic oriented managers tend to adhere more to guidelines (section 4.2.7), this study has also found that they are more likely to be risk-averse and conservative as compared to non-karmic oriented managers. An implication of these findings is the possibility that a belief in karma might enhance the marketing managers’ adherence to the regulation and codes of conduct, but at the same time limit their creativity and innovation. However, further research would need to be undertaken to explore this possibility.

5.1.3.2. Perceived alternatives

This study has found that karmic oriented marketing managers would be more selective about choosing which product to promote and which industry and/or company to work in (section 4.2.2). This suggests that a belief in karma influences various alternatives considered in marketing managers’ decisions. These findings provide further support for the H-V model, which states that differences in marketers’ personal beliefs might lead to differences in “perceived alternatives” (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). In reviewing the literature, no information was found on the association between a belief in karma and the career choice of marketing managers. This study suggests that a belief in karma potentially limits the talent pool of companies or industries that market contentious products; whereas companies and/or industries that market non-contentious products could use their values to recruit karmic oriented managers.
5.1.4. The perceived influence of karmic beliefs on teleological evaluation

This section discusses the findings supporting the perceived influence of a belief in karma on the “teleological evaluation” process of marketing managers. This process involves marketers focusing on: (i) the “perceived consequences” of the decisions; (ii) the “probabilities of consequences”; (iii) the “desirability of consequences”; and (iv) the perceived “importance of stakeholders” involved in the decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006).

5.1.4.1. Perceived consequences

As discussed previously, this study has found that marketing managers would make different decisions based on whether they believed that good (or bad) outcomes in the future would occur as a result of previous good (or bad) actions (section 4.2). Consistent with the explanation by the H-V model, this is because they differ in “perceived consequences” or in “their beliefs as to the likelihood that certain consequences will occur” (Hunt, 2013, p. 67).

The findings from this study have indicated that for karmic oriented managers, non-materialistic factors such as relationships, well-being, social and cultural gains are highly important and should be prioritised in decision-making (section 4.2.4). These findings combined with the findings from previous empirical research, that marketing managers with higher ‘love of money’ tend to have less ethical intentions than those with lower ‘love of money’ (Singhapakdi et al., 2013), help explain the findings of karmic oriented marketing managers making more ethical decisions as discussed previously. These findings broadly build on the previous empirical study in a consumer context by Pace (2013), who found that a belief in karma is one Buddhist principle resulting in careful and sensible consumption acts and a reduction in materialism amongst consumers. A combination of these findings suggests that a belief in karma can help reduce materialism of both marketing managers and consumers.

An implication of these findings is marketing managers can integrate karmic principles into co-creation marketing campaigns to mitigate materialism. Materialism is generally detrimental to individuals and society because it leads individuals toward questionable practices and threatens their well-being (Pace, 2013). Carrington and Neville (2016) contend that integrating the insights of consumers to create and co-create value that is salient to marketing managers provides a strong strategic competitive advantage for organisations. Thus, with the insights that a belief in karma can reduce materialism of consumers, marketing managers can now integrate
their own karmic beliefs to co-create campaigns with consumers to create a stronger impact to reduce materialism. This is hoped to contribute to a more sustainable consumption agenda, one of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015).

Moreover, the current study extends the previous empirical findings from Valliere (2008) within a general business context. The findings from Valliere suggested that karmic beliefs guide religious entrepreneurs to set decent business goals and profitability, in both Eastern and Western cultures. Previous research has suggested that the pressure of goal setting is among the most difficult ethical dilemmas faced by marketing managers (Chonko & Hunt, 1985, 2000, 2018). As such, this study suggests that incorporating karmic philosophy into organisational practices can potentially reduce the stress of goal setting for marketing managers. Careful consideration of goal setting from organisations can bring better well-being for their employees (Singh & Singh, 2012). The link between karma and well-being was found in previous conceptual research in a general business context where karmic beliefs can guide religious business people to act in a manner that enhances their quality of life and the lives of their stakeholders, hence improve their personal and professional well-being (Marques, 2012).

5.1.4.2. Probabilities of consequences

This study has shown that karmic oriented managers perceive that bad karma would occur at some stage in the future and/or be observable in this life (section 4.1.5). This suggests that a belief in karma influences their perceived “probabilities of consequences”. According to the H-V model, “probabilities of consequences” is influenced by marketing managers’ belief systems, which ultimately influences decision-making (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006).

Further analysis of the research findings suggests that a belief in karma drives marketing managers to focus on long-term and sustainable outcomes rather than focusing on instant benefits (section 4.2.3). These findings combined with the findings from previous empirical research, that long-term orientation leads to more ethical behaviours in business (Nevins et al., 2007), help explain the findings of karmic oriented marketing managers making more ethical decisions as discussed in previous sections. The findings of this study have extended previous research in terms of a relationship between a belief in karma and long-term orientation of consumers and salespeople (e.g., Converse et al., 2012; Kopalle et al., 2010; Kulow & Kramer, 2016; Singh & Singh, 2012). They also add to previous research which suggests that karmic belief is among Buddhist doctrines that have implications in sustainability-related
organisational practices (Abeydeera et al., 2016). An implication of these findings is a belief in karma might contribute to more sustainable marketing practices.

**5.1.4.3. Desirability of consequences**

This study has found that karmic oriented managers are more likely to avoid doing bad actions due to their fear of future bad karma. Likewise, they try to do good things to avoid comeuppance (section 4.2.6). This shows their “[un]desirability of consequences”, a factor that influences the decision-making process of marketing managers according to the H-V model (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006).

The findings from this study do not fit with those empirically found by Kulow and Kramer (2016) amongst Western non-religious consumers. The research from Kulow and Kramer (2016) indicated that karmic beliefs would lead consumers to invest in good future karma actively via pro-social activities. However, the findings from the current study support the conceptual findings from Marques (2012) in a general business context and from an Eastern religious perspective. Marques (2012) assert that a belief in karma might prevent workers from engaging in negative behaviours because they do not want to be victimised by their own doings. Therefore, future research might be required to understand the motivation of karmic oriented managers to engage in good behaviours, whether it is to reap the good karma or to prevent bad karma. Kopalle et al. (2010) raised a similar question that future research should examine whether karmic oriented consumers set higher expectations toward product performance to capture rewards or to avoid punishment.

**5.1.4.4. The consideration of stakeholders**

This study has found that a belief in karma influences how marketing managers consider different stakeholders involved in their decisions (section 4.2.5). This is a further evidence suggesting that a belief in karma influences marketing managers’ decision-making via influencing their evaluation of the importance of stakeholders. The H-V model postulates that marketers’ beliefs lead to the variance in the perceived “importance of stakeholders”, which eventually influences ethical behaviours (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006).

Moreover, while the current literature suggests that karma would affect the doer of the action (e.g., Allen et al., 2015; Reichenbach, 1988), this study has found that karmic effects are
perceived to occur not only to the doers of the actions but also to the organisations, the communities, and even the world that the doers belonged to (section 4.1.1). The findings of this study demonstrate that karmic oriented marketing managers are more likely to make decisions for the benefits of wider stakeholders rather than for their own individual benefits. These wider stakeholders include the environment and the planet (section 4.1.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.5), which suggest that karmic beliefs can inspire marketing managers in a Western context to make decisions that benefit the society.

These findings extend the current literature on the positive contribution of karmic beliefs to society. Firstly, in an Eastern religious context, the findings of this study offer some empirical support for Low (2013) who conceptually suggested that karmic beliefs might contribute to socially responsible marketing. Moreover, this study builds on the previous research which suggested that a belief in karma enables religious business people to balance their self-interests and the interests of the wider community (Abeydeera et al., 2016). This study also adds to previous research which found that karmic beliefs encourage religious entrepreneurs to do business to improve society, rather than generate personal wealth at the expense of others (Valliere, 2008). This is because karmic oriented managers are more concerned with their stakeholders and society, and less likely to be driven by selfish motives (Singh & Singh, 2012).

Secondly, in a Western and non-religious context, the findings of this study extend the current literature on the contribution of karmic beliefs to prosocial behaviours of consumers for the benefit of others (e.g., Converse et al., 2012; Kulow & Kramer, 2016). A combination of these findings suggests that karmic beliefs could inspire marketing managers to act pro-socially for the benefit of wider stakeholders, including the society and the planet, at least in the long run. An implication of these findings is that karmic beliefs may motivate marketing managers to act both as decision-makers who shape society and society’s interaction with the environment, and as healers who correct the environmental infractions caused by society (Low, 2013). These findings provide further support for emerging conversations about karma marketing, which is about sustainable marketing ensure that society has sufficient and quality resources to use in the future (Kho, 2015; Laukaikul, 2015). In the same way, these findings provide further support for recent adaptation of karma capitalism, which encourages companies to create value and social justice at the same time by switching from “greed” to “green” (Engardio & McGregor, 2006).
Furthermore, this study has found that a belief in karma helps marketing managers be more customer-focused (section 4.2.5). These findings were complementary to the conceptual proposition from Singh and Singh (2012) who posit that in an Eastern religious context, karmic oriented salespeople develop better relationships with customers. Accordingly, it could be suggested that karmic beliefs can help marketing managers to build a positive relationship with customers. A positive and long-term relationship with customers is important (Baker, 2010; Varey, 2010). It is even more pertinent when contemporary marketing is moving towards service and/or relationship marketing (Carrington & Neville, 2016; Engardio & McGregor, 2006). An implication of these findings is that if companies communicate a karmic oriented vision and/or mission statement, they can gain support from their customers.

Taken together, the findings from this study have suggested that a belief in karma may influence marketing managers’ decisions in terms of being more concerned of the wider stakeholders, including the customers, society, and the environment. Previous research has shown that the careful consideration of stakeholders and concern for environmental impact are among the key factors that elevate a sustainably superior positioning for companies, which brings them more profits and competitive advantages (Kapitan et al., 2019). Thus, the findings from this study suggest that integrating karmic principles into marketing management practices can help build a stronger marketing positioning for companies.

5.2. Managerial implications

The findings of this study suggest several implications for marketing practitioners, given that ethical marketing decisions can bring both resource advantage for organisations and desirable outcomes for society (Ferrell et al., 2013). With evidence that a belief in karma has a role in influencing ethical marketing decisions, marketing practitioners may consider designing and facilitating management practices in line with karmic principles. For instance, companies may incorporate karmic principles into codes of conduct, which could be used for guidance and training for marketing managers. This can help elevate a more ethical workplace, reduce unhealthy competition amongst employees, and enhance their collaboration at work (Singh & Singh, 2012).

Additionally, companies may consider promoting karmic principles in organisations to foster a positive and long-term relationship with customers and stakeholders. A positive and long-term relationship with customers is important because marketing has long been underlining the
mutually beneficial and long-term relationships between companies and customers (Baker, 2010; Varey, 2010). When contemporary marketing is moving towards service and/or relationship marketing, which focus on value creation and/or co-creation between companies and customers, building positive customer relationship is of utmost importance for organisations (Carrington & Neville, 2016; Engardio & McGregor, 2006).

Companies can consider incorporating karmic principals into their vision and mission statements. This may encourage the employees, customers and stakeholders to support and/or give back to companies because a belief in karma motivates people to invest in prosocial behaviours (Allen et al., 2015; Converse et al., 2012; Kulow & Kramer, 2016). Communicating a vision and mission statement in line with karma may also help companies attract karmic oriented managers into their organisations.

Moreover, companies can incorporate karma into their recruitment and selection processes. For example, a belief in karma can be added into person-organisation fit tools, such as psychographic profiles or organisational culture profiles. Companies can identify the strength of marketing managers’ beliefs in karma before hiring them employing existing karma scales, or by including questions to understand the candidates’ beliefs in karma in recruitment interviews or aptitude tests. Potentially those marketing managers who have a stronger belief in karma would be considered for recruitment.

With evidence of the influence of karmic beliefs on ethical behaviours of both consumers and marketing managers, companies can now integrate these insights to invest in marketing campaigns to create better values and sustainable benefits for society as a whole. For example, karmic principles can be incorporated into branding and/or marketing activities, similar to what has been practised by KarmaCola (KarmaCola, 2018) and LoveNZ ("It's a karma thing," 2012). Moreover, integrating consumer insights to co-create value that is salient to marketing managers provides a strong strategic competitive advantage for organisations (Carrington & Neville, 2016). Thus, the combined influences of marketing managers’ and consumers’ karmic beliefs on ethical and sustainable behaviours can be leveraged to co-create marketing campaigns that have sustainable outcomes. Some examples of these campaigns include educating conscious consumption and/or reducing materialism, educating efficient use of natural resources and/or correcting environmental infractions. These co-creation marketing campaigns are hoped to contribute to the Responsible Consumption and Production Goal, one of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015).
Furthermore, when setting commercial objectives, organisations need to consider factors that karmic marketing managers tend to focus on in their decisions (e.g., outcomes that are more people oriented and/or less materialistically oriented, emphasising long-term and sustainable benefits, more likely for the benefits of and the relationship with wider stakeholders). This can help reduce the pressure of goal setting for marketing managers, which is among the most difficult ethical dilemmas faced by marketing managers (Chonko & Hunt, 1985, 2000, 2018). In addition, harmonising companies’ achievement and managers’ karmic beliefs can help improve managers’ psychological well-being (Singh & Singh, 2012). This is because their pressure of goal setting is reduced, at the same time their personal beliefs are considered by organisations, meaning that they are not torn apart between commercial benefits for organisations and their own personal beliefs (Singh & Singh, 2012). Eventually, considering marketing managers’ beliefs in karma when setting organisational goals can help enhance managers’ quality of life and the lives of their stakeholders (Marques, 2010, 2012).

5.3. Limitations of this study

The generalisability of the findings from this study is subject to several limitations. In addition to the points mentioned in section 3.4, other limitations became visible during the progress of the research. Firstly, due to the convenient sampling, most of the marketing managers participated in this research are females. Therefore, the findings might not be generalised to all genders. Secondly, although the marketing managers in this research have had experience working in various industries/sectors, many of them were working in the higher education sector at the time of the interviews. As such, the findings from the research might not be reflective of what could be found in other sectors.

5.4. Future research

The findings from this research provide the following recommendations for further research.

Since most of the respondents in this research claimed to be karmic oriented managers, they could articulate their perceptions of karma and the influence of a belief in karma in marketing managers’ decisions. Future research could recruit non-karmic oriented marketing managers to explore their general perceptions of the influence of a belief in karma in marketing decisions.
Future research could quantify the extent that a belief in karma might influence the marketing managers’ decision-making, potentially via quantitative research. For example:

- What are the differences in ethical values (such as honesty, integrity, law abiding) and deontological norms held by karmic oriented managers versus those held by non-karmic oriented managers?
- To what extent a belief in karma might influence the career choice of karmic oriented managers as compared to non-karmic oriented managers?
- Whether karmic marketing managers behave more ethically to capture rewards or to avoid punishment?
- What are the differences in creativity and innovation of karmic oriented managers as compared to non-karmic oriented managers?

5.5. Conclusion from the research

In-depth interviews with marketing managers in a Western context have revealed the influence of a belief in karma on decision-making in marketing. To the best knowledge of the researcher, this is one of the first studies that examine the influence of karmic beliefs on marketing managers’ decisions. This study has found that marketing managers in a Western context believe that ethical (or unethical) marketing behaviours would bring along good (or bad) karma for marketing managers and their communities at some stage in the future. A belief in karma can influence marketing managers’ perceptions of ethical content involved in a marketing situation, hence influencing various alternatives they would take. When making decisions, karmic oriented marketing managers would consider not only their own moral values and their duties to achieve profits for their organisations. They would also consider the potential consequences from their behaviours, and various stakeholders involved in their decisions, including themselves and wider stakeholders.

The findings from this study suggest that karmic beliefs influence marketing managers’ decision-making in both their personal and professional lives. For example, they tend to make decisions that are more ethical and more adherent to guidelines and/or codes of conduct. They carefully choose the products to promote and/or industries to work in. They tend to be more honest, transparent, and authentic in creating marketing and/or advertising campaigns. This study has also found that a belief in karma inspires marketing managers to make decisions that are more people-oriented, more long-term focused, and for the benefits of wider stakeholders.
including the society and the environment. For instance, they cautiously focus on minimising waste for the environment and tend to strive for sustainable outcomes.

This study is hoped to contribute to the literature on ethical decision-making, a research area that continues being important because of the complexity of human characteristics such as personal beliefs (Lehnert et al., 2015; Mumford et al., 2003). From a theoretical perspective, the findings from this study have suggested that a belief in karma can be added to the “belief system” construct of the H-V theory. This study demonstrates that karma is a belief system that influences the ethical behaviours of marketing managers via influencing the way they navigate through ethical dilemmas. This study has also contributed to the current literature on the influence of karmic beliefs on ethical behaviours in a marketing context, which has typically been examined from the perspective of consumers and salespeople and within an Eastern religious context.

From a practical perspective, this study has suggested that marketing practices and policies incorporating a karmic philosophy are likely to benefit not only the companies but also society, at least in the long term. Hopefully, by considering karma, marketing managers can build more sustainable marketing, which contributes to more profits and competitive advantages for their companies (Kapitan et al., 2019). It is also hoped that this study can contribute to the emerging conversations about karma marketing (Laukaikul, 2015), karma capitalism (Engardio & McGregor, 2006), and the Responsible Consumption and Production Goal of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015).
Reference


Kleisen, L. M. B. (2013). A positive view on road safety: Can ‘car karma’ contribute to safe driving styles? 
Accident Analysis & Prevention, 50, 705-712. doi:10.1016/j.aap.2012.06.022


Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical approval form

Dr K Robertson  
Department of Marketing  
Division of Commerce  
School of Business

12 November 2018

Dear Dr Robertson,

I am writing to confirm for you the status of your proposal entitled “The perceptions of karma amongst marketing managers and the impact that karma has on marketing decision-making,” which was originally received on October 30, 2018. The Human Ethics Committee’s reference number for this proposal is D18/352.

The above application was Category B and had therefore been considered within the Department or School. The outcome was subsequently reviewed by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. The outcome of that consideration was that the proposal was approved.

Approval is for up to three years from the date of HOD approval. If this project has not been completed within three years of this date, re-approval must be requested. If the nature, consent, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise me in writing.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Mr Gary Witte  
Manager, Academic Committees
Tel: 479 8256  
Email: gary.witte@otago.ac.nz
Appendix B: Information Sheet for Participants and Consent Letter

Reference Number: D18/352
Date: 27 November 2018

PERCEPTIONS OF KARMA AMONGST MARKETING MANAGERS

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, I thank you. If you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you and I thank you for considering my request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

This study aims to explore how marketing managers perceive the concept of karma and how these perceptions influence the decisions in their marketing jobs.

The researcher undertaking this project is Tam Le. This project is a part of the requirements for a Master of Commerce in Marketing Management at the Department of Marketing, University of Otago.

What Types of Participants are being sought?

Twelve marketing managers, who are in New Zealand and have at least two years’ work experience in marketing, are being invited to take part in an interview. These participants will be from a wide variety of marketing areas and their activities might include but are not limited to: (1) identifying the target segments/markets; (2) developing marketing strategies and marketing plans; (3) employing relevant marketing programs including decisions on 4Ps (products, price, promotion and place); (4) deploying marketing plans and programs; (5) evaluating the performance of marketing campaigns; and (6) managing customer’s relationship.

What will Participants be asked to do?

Participation in this project is voluntary. Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself.

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be invited to an interview. The interview will run like an informal conversation and will take approximately 30 minutes. The interview will either be conducted face-to-face at a location that suits your convenience or via teleconference (such as Skype).

The approximate questions that you will be asked are listed below. These questions will be open-ended and there is no right or wrong answer. No personal information will be collected except age and ethnicity. No names or any other personal information will be recorded.

Your interviews will be audiotaped upon your agreement, then will be transcribed. Once the typed transcript of your interview is available, it will be sent to you so that you can check and edit any detail as you wish. Although some demographic information about you will be collected, this will only be used to describe the research participants in a general sense.

According to the University of Otago’s regulation, cash should not be used as incentives for research projects. Therefore, each participant will be offered one $30 New World shopping voucher as the reimbursement for his/her expenses of participating in this research project.
What Data or Information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

This project will involve interviews with participants. The discussion involves an open questioning technique where the specific questions asked will be:

- Please tell me about your role in any way you wish.
- What do you enjoy least in your marketing role and why?
- If I say the word karma, what does this mean to you personally?
- In what ways do you think karma fits into the role of a marketing manager?
- How do you think karma can influence decisions in marketing?
- Generally, have you faced any work situation that conflicted with your personal or work philosophy?

Other general questions may be asked but will be based around gaining more detailed information regarding what marketing managers think about the concept of karma. The precise nature of the questions that will be asked at the interview has not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the Ethics Committee of the Department of Marketing is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interviews, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel uncomfortable at any stage of the interview discussions, you can ask to pause the interview, refuse to answer the question, or end the interview. You can withdraw from the research at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind. Although unlikely, it is possible that the interview process might raise issues about the work environment that are of concern to you. In this instance, you can call the employment tribunal where you can receive free advice. The Employment tribunal phone number is 0800 110 274.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project, the audio recordings will be destroyed. The transcripts will not contain any personal information and will be stored securely. As required by the University’s research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years, after which it will be destroyed.

The outcomes of interviews will be used to write a thesis as part of the requirements for the degree of Master’s in Commerce at the University of Otago. This thesis may be published and will be available through the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand), but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity.

What if participants have any questions? If you have questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Ms. Tam Le  
Master of Commerce candidate  
Department of Marketing  
Otago Business School, University of Otago  
Email: leta4738@student.otago.ac.nz

or

Dr. Kirsten Robertson  
Senior Lecturer  
Department of Marketing  
Otago Business School, University of Otago  
Email: kirsten.robertson@otago.ac.nz  
Phone: +64 3 479 8451

This study has been approved by the Department stated above. However, if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph +643 479 8256 or email gary.witte@otago.ac.nz). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
PERCEPTIONS OF KARMA AMONGST MARKETING MANAGERS

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage. I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. I understand that this project will be audio recorded;
4. I understand that I will be given the opportunity to read and revise my responses once they have been transcribed;
5. Personal identifying information such as audio recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;
6. This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes:
   - Please tell me about your role in any way you wish.
   - What do you enjoy least in your marketing role and why?
   - If I say the word karma, what does this mean to you personally?
   - In what ways do you think karma fits into the role of a marketing manager?
   - How do you think karma can influence decisions in marketing?
   - Generally, have you faced any work situation that conflicted with your personal or work philosophy?

   The precise nature of the questions that will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable, I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
7. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand), but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.
8. I will be offered one $30 New World shopping voucher as a reimbursement for my expenses of participating in this research project.

I agree to take part in this project.

.............................. .............................. ..............................
(Signature of participant) (Printed Name) (Date)

This study has been approved by the Department stated above. However, if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph +643 479 8256 or email gary.witte@otago.ac.nz). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix C: Interview guide

THE ROLE OF THE BELIEF IN KARMA IN MARKETING MANAGERS' DECISIONS

Semi-structured interview guide

Date of interview: ___________________ Pseudonyms: ________________

GREETINGS & ETHICAL PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I am Tam Le from the Department of Marketing at the University of Otago. I am speaking with marketing managers in New Zealand to understand their perceptions about the concept of karma. I would like to hear your own point of view. There is no right or wrong answer; I am interested in your opinions. I want to learn from you about what you know about this concept and how you think this concept might play a role in marketing.

The interview will take about 30 minutes and will be recorded. From time to time, I might need to take some notes because the questions of the interview will depend on how the conversation develops. Some questions might sound obvious to you, but please understand that this is a part of the interview protocol. It is important that I understand your answers correctly.

The information that you provide will remain strictly confidential. Neither your name nor the name of your company will be mentioned. If you feel uncomfortable at any stage of the interview discussions, you can ask to pause the interview, refuse to answer the question, leave the interview, or withdraw from the research.

Do you have any question before we start?

Now I will turn on the recorder.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Part 1: Contextualisation

Pre-printed text to show to respondents: Marketers have responsibilities to a broad set of stakeholders, however maximising benefits for all the stakeholders is impossible. As such, marketers usually face ethical dilemmas. An ethical dilemma normally involves a compromise between marketers’ moral values and/or beliefs and the aim to increase profits for their companies. Accordingly, most marketing decisions made by marketers involve some degree of ethical judgment or ethical content. Indeed, making ethical decisions is a part of making marketing decisions.

- **Question 1:** Weighing up the potential outcomes for your stakeholders, what personal beliefs guide your marketing decisions?
Part 2: Apprehending the phenomenon

Pre-printed text to show to respondents: Karma

- **Question 2:** What does karma mean to you? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear this word? How would you describe karma in your own words?

Part 3: Clarifying the phenomenon

Pre-printed text to show to respondents: Karma means ‘the results of our actions’, whatever we send out into the world will come back to us in one way or another. It may be today, tomorrow, or years from now, but it will happen and usually happens in a form which is different from the original action. In Western cultures, karma is evident in common sayings such as “what goes around comes around”, “you reap what you sow”, or the belief that sins lead to punishment and virtue leads to rewards.

- **Question 3:** Thinking of a marketer who DOES believe in karma, can you think of the types of marketing decisions or marketing actions that they might make?
- **Question 4:** Thinking of a marketer who DOES believe in karma, how might they consider their stakeholders in the decisions they make?
- **Question 5:** Thinking of a marketer who DOES NOT believe in karma, can you think of the types of marketing decisions or marketing actions that they might make?
- **Question 6:** Thinking of a marketer who DOES NOT believe in karma, how might they consider their stakeholders in the decisions they make?
- **Question 7:** What are the differences between the marketing decisions made by a marketer who BELIEVES in karma and the marketing decisions made by a marketer who DOES NOT believe in karma?
- **Question 8:** How do you think a belief in karma might influence the decisions that YOU take in YOUR marketing role?
- **Question 9:** Is there anything else you want to bring up or ask about based on our conversation so far?

**CLOSING:** Thank you once again for participating in this research.
## Appendix D: Summary of literature on karma in business, management, and marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implications for Research context</th>
<th>Conceptual</th>
<th>Empirical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The influence of a belief in karma a general business and/or management context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainable practices</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Abeydeera et al. (2016): (a systematic review of 30 journal articles and 20 books/book chapters): Within Buddhism, karma has implications in several areas of sustainability-related organisational practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Budhiastra (2016): Within Hinduism, karma can imply sustainable tourism strategy in Bali</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Muniapan and Satpathy (2013): Within Hinduism, karma is relevant to CSR, motivates the organisations to carry out activities to serve humanity.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pio (2005): Within Hinduism, karma can drive corporate citizenship in India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ananthram and Chan (2016): Within Hinduism, karma can lead to more ethical behaviours in leadership among managers and business leaders in India.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agarwalla et al. (2015): Within Hinduism, karma can enhance transformational leadership among managers and business leaders in India.</td>
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<tr>
<td>General business/management practice</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Marques (2012): Within Buddhism, karma can contribute to consciousness at work, an alternative ethical system against the mounting unethical business practices.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marques (2010): Within Buddhism, karma can enhance personal and professional well-being in contemporary organisations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Valliere (2008): Within Buddhism, karma can affect the goal setting and the objectives pursued by Buddhist entrepreneurs in Nepal and Canada.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pace (2013): Within Buddhism, karma results in careful and sensible consumption acts, and a reduction in materialism among consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kopalle et al. (2010): a stronger belief in karma leads to higher expectations of Indian consumers toward the product performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-religious</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kulow and Kramer (2016): a belief in karma leads American consumers to greater intentions to do right by supporting a charity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing management</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Low (2013): Within Buddhism, karma works together with other Buddhist tenets to inspire a more social responsible marketing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales management</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Singh and Singh (2012): higher levels of karma orientation of salespeople leads to more ethical behaviours, spiritual well-being; enhances their selling effectiveness and relationships with customers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>