

# To Reduce and Not to Reduce Resource Consumption? That is two questions

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## Introduction

Empirical and theoretical work in social psychology has been devoted to determine some key factors leading to pro-environmental intentions and behaviours. In this context, models of attitudes such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB, Ajzen & Madden, 1986) have been used to examine the determinants of the intentions and behaviours for different issues such as for example environmental activism, water conservation, recycling, or purchase of sustainable food products. However, studies have shown that the inclusion of additional constructs to the TPB improved the prediction mainly of intention but also of behaviour. Moreover, some recent research showed that individuals' action can be influenced by both intentions to act and intentions not to act because performing or not performing an action for an individual can be based on different goals and involve different self-regulation strategies (Richetin, Conner, & Perugini, 2011). In this perspective, we argue that considering the cognitions related to both doing and not doing would improve the understanding and prediction of pro-environmental behaviours.

## Method

Two studies set within a high-school (Study 1,  $N = 758$ ) and a university (Study 2,  $N = 104$ ) examined the cognitions for reducing and not reducing resource consumption in the context of the TPB.

## Results

Results showed that goals associated with reducing versus not reducing resource

consumption were not opposite but separate, implying that people do not engage in pro-environmental behaviours because of a lack of motivation but because they have a motivation to not do so. Additionally, the construct and discriminant validity of the TPB constructs associated with reducing versus not reducing resource consumption was demonstrated. Moreover, results revealed that both Intentions (to reduce and to not reduce resource consumption) simultaneously predicted a series of behaviours. Finally, results indicated a mediation role for the importance of ecological dimensions on the effect of both Intentions on a mock TV choice and a mediation role for the importance of non ecological dimensions on the effect of Intention of not reducing on the same TV choice.

## Discussion

These results imply both that reducing and not reducing resource consumption follow two relatively different mental processes and that both can contribute to explain and predict ecologically relevant behaviours. Moreover this contribution also has implications for research into behaviour change. In fact, pro-environmental behaviour can mean doing something such as recycling glass but can also mean not doing something else such as leaving the water running while brushing teeth. Considering that the cognitions underlying each doing and not doing option of the two behaviours are not the opposites, one might want to start considering different approaches for increasing the performance of pro-environmental behaviours or for decreasing

anti-environmental ones. To conclude, we propose a new focus for research to better understand the underlying mechanisms of engagement (or disengagement) with pro-environmental behaviours so to provide new insights on how to intervene more successfully.

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### **References**

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