

A Social Dilemma Approach to Sustainable Consumption: The Role of Value Orientation, Time Perspective, and Self-efficacy Beliefs with Regard to Encouraging Others

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Purchase decisions between sustainable and unsustainable groceries can be construed as social dilemmas because they entail trade-offs between individual and societal interests. The purchase of sustainable products represents the cooperative choice that contributes to long-term societal interests (i.e. attaining a sustainable development) and the purchase of unsustainable products represents the non-cooperative choice that contributes to short-term individual interests (e.g., saving money and time). Previous research suggests that the purchase of sustainable products is associated with attaching importance to social values and having a long-term perspective.

We assume that, besides social values and long-term perspective, self-efficacy beliefs with regard to encouraging others (SDSE-others) play an important role in decisions to buy sustainable products. It requires the joint efforts of many consumers to make a substantial contribution to sustainable development. Believing that one's own sustainable behaviors can encourage others to promote sustainable development (i.e., strong SDSE-others) may thus be a precondition for purchasing sustainable products.

Study

We addressed these assumptions in an online survey among Norwegian consumers ($N = 402$) in which we investigated if social values, time perspective, and SDSE-others predict purchases of sustainable groceries. With regard to social values we addressed two value classifications: the social value orientations (SVO) proposed by Messick and McClintock and the ten basic human values proposed by Schwartz. This allowed us to investigate the relative contribution of the two value classifications in predicting sustainable consumption decisions.

Measures

SVO was measured by means of a decomposed games measure; the Schwartz values were measured by means of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (e.g., Schwartz, et al., 2001); time perspective was measured by means of the CFC Questionnaire (Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, & Edwards, 1994); SDSE-others was measured by means of six questionnaire items; and purchase of sustainable groceries was measured by means of a purchase habit (PH) questionnaire.

Findings

The findings support our assumptions: Purchase of sustainable groceries was related to social values and a long-term perspective. As predicted, SDSE-others contributed to explaining variation in PH. Post-hoc analyses revealed that SDSE-others partially mediated the relationship between time perspective, social values, and PH. With regard to the two value classifications we found that the self-transcendence and self-enhancement values of Schwartz's value classification had greater explanatory power than SVO. We discuss implications for future research and for practitioners active in promoting sustainable consumption.

References

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