

Evaluation

Subtle activation of sustainability values to enhance sustainable choice
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Consistency in message is important

TransForum problem

If we consider the results of questionnaires it can be concluded that the Dutch consumer is very sympathetic towards sustainable products. Nevertheless sales figures of sustainable products do not reflect these positive attitudes. Apparently there is a gap between attitudes and behaviour. It appears that the positive attitude towards sustainability is not active in the minds of the consumer at the moment of product purchase.

Aim

Making the positive consumer attitude towards sustainable products activate and thus relevant at the moment of purchase.

Set-up

This research has two lines. 1) Based on market data the potential for sales of specific sustainable products and their associated values will be scoped (in progress). 2) In a series of controlled experiments, activation of positive values at the moment of product selection is studied.

Main findings

The effects of sustainability lie in the future, and benefit society as a whole. This means there is a large psychological distance between sustainability goals and their effects. Product choice is often focused on benefit for me and effects now. This makes product choice a goal with a low psychological distance. Similarly actions taken by me have a low distance and those by society as a whole a large distance. Goals with high distance (sustainability) can hypothetically be supported by making the distance smaller, or by linking the highly distant goal to a goal with low distance. How the psychological distance of actions relate is less clear.

The current study shows that if a product is framed with a high psychological distance i.e. something that is good for the whole world in the long term, this product is chosen more frequently if the action perspective is also framed as something of high distance i.e. something we do with a large group of people. On the other hand a product aimed at a low distant goal; something good tomorrow, works best if connected to something you can do alone. This indicates that actions and goals should have a similar psychological distance, i.e. that it should fit. Mismatching combinations of low and high distance (me, future), (all of us now, now) were less successful.

Conclusion

When marketing sustainable products, one has to be very careful to present a consistent message. A fit in psychological distance between action perspective and goal perspective can strengthen sustainable choice. Misfit between Inconsistencies action perspective and goal perspective does not lead to more sustainable behaviour.

Meaning for TransForum

Framing and positioning of products, and the demand made to consumers should be carefully balanced. Fitting combinations of goal and action perspectives may result in increased consumer adoption of sustainable behaviour.

Implications for MA

When involving individual consumers, make sure that the small sustainable actions by individuals support sustainable goals at low psychological distance (near future, concrete, local, etc.). For example when you want an individual to behave sustainably "what YOU can do" immediate feedback is probably more successful. Initiatives of retail that reconnects urbanites with the environment would fall in these actions. When involving larger parts of society, aim at more distant goals (more distant future, abstract, global, etc.), and this is the type of behaviours where NGO can mobilise larger parts of society

Implication for connecting values

Carefully consider what needs to be done. When aiming at concrete goals in the near future, involve individual consumers with concrete immediate action. When aiming at more distant goals, aim to involve large groups in society, and allow for more abstract and delayed actions.

Implications for the knowledge infrastructure

The rational actor model that assumes people weigh sustainability similarly in several situations is no longer sufficient. Innovation towards sustainability requires more research which goals and which attitudes connect at what stages in the decision making of consumers towards sustainability