

The Green Gap: Why We Would Like To, but We Do Not Behave Sustainable

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The so-called intention-behavior gap is a main discussed obstacle for the shift towards a consumer's sustainable consumption model. A considerable amount of past studies have widely used the Theory of Planned Behavior, (TPB, Ajzen, 1991) for finding new causal constructs of behavioral intention, but not many of them are known regarding actual behavior and what constructs can fill the intention-behavior gap. To fill this gap in this research we build on the TPB for analyzing behavioral drivers in one-off behavior (single-act criterion) and shifting routine behavior (repeated-observation criterion) in sustainable food consumption (meat reduction and free meat choice), using an observational longitudinal study. We use a Latent Markov Model with Covariates to study the unobserved heterogeneity of actual consumption in an online recipe community and we show that when habit is strong, the intention-behaviour relation becomes weak. To overcome this lock-in process we propose the "Environmental Awareness of our Own Impact" (E.A.O.I.) as positive informational influence on the behavioral change. We test an intervention on customer groups (defined based on combined level of intention, behaviour and habit strength) and we show that the E.A.O.I. is effective on behavioral change, while the general environmental awareness impacts only consumer's intention. Subsequently, we test different constructs of E.A.O.I to select the more impactful solution. These findings provide new evidence for nudging sustainable behavior and reconciling contradictory past findings while contributing to the debate regarding the necessary behavioral change tool to be used for facilitating the spread of a sustainable food consumption.