

PhD project – Fair Trade, ECO, and BIO in the Store:

Does Adding Sustainable Labels Add Any Value For Consumers and Brands?

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Description of the project:

Nowadays, logos such as Fair Trade, Eco, or Bio, make it easy for consumers to spot if a product is sustainable or not. In itself, especially since consumers increasingly care about sustainability, the signaling properties of the sustainable label should be sufficient to convince consumers to buy the sustainable product. At the same time, consumers often fail to translate their sustainable purchase intentions to behaviors (i.e. the intention-behavior gap). Past research has cast doubt if sustainable labeling is effective at all (e.g. Edinger et al. 2018).

We focus on the value of singular sustainable labels versus sustainable labels combined with other labels (e.g. nutritional labels). We are particularly interested in how novel technologies (e.g. social media, QR-codes) can further improve the use of single sustainable vs. multiple (non)-sustainable labels. We build on past research that suggests that the meaning of sustainable labels is often lost on consumers and that consumers are highly skeptical about the veracity of the sustainable claim (White, Habib, & Hardisty 2019). This often causes consumers to devalue the sustainable claim, and because of this, sustainable labeling can at times hurt, rather than benefit, the brand (e.g. van der Wal, van Horen, & Grinstein 2018) and make sustainable products less attractive (Bodur, Tofighi, & Grohmann 2016). On the other hand, sustainable labels can also create value for the consumer. For instance, sustainable purchases can enhance consumer wellbeing (Tezer & Bodur 2020) and sustainable labels can improve brand reputation (Brunk & de Boer, 2020, Chernev & Blair 2021). Based on the aforementioned research, this research sets out to explore when and how sustainable labels create value for consumers and brands. We also consider how such sustainability via a product label is embedded in wider brand communication through social media (Villaroel Ordenes et al. 2019) and emerging technologies (Mahr and Huh 2022). This, in turn, can provide novel insights in how sustainable labels can add value.

Through this, this research contributes towards a sustainable future where sustainable products are valuable to consumers and brands.

Good to know:

This research is conducted under the cross-disciplinary spearhead of FSD (<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/fsd>) linking data science, sustainable consumption and globalisation. Maastricht university also offers a laboratory setting to conduct research as well as a cooperative environment. Techniques used for this research are data-analysis, experiments, surveys, and field work.

Features of a good candidate:

- A good knowledge of English to read and present academic work is necessary.
- A background in economics, psychology, social sciences, or any related domain is required.
- A strong interest for sustainable consumption.
- A strong understanding of experimental designs and how to implement them.

References:

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