

# The Phantom of the 'Responsible Consumer': Unmasking the Intention-Action Gap with Indirect Questioning Technique

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## **Abstract**

The intention-action gap stands out in research on consumer ethics and sustainable consumption since decades. The current research explores the role of social desirable responding (SDR) for the appearance of this gap by utilizing an indirect questioning technique. An online experiment demonstrates that in line with most market surveys, consumers present themselves as very responsible when being assessed with the standard survey approach (i.e., direct questioning). However, responses of participants towards the exact same measures of consumers' social responsibility perceptions and behavioural intentions heavily dropped when applying indirect questioning, which indicates a substantial overstatement of consumers' social responsibility in traditional market surveys. This study also provides novel evidence for the validity and underlying mechanism of the indirect questioning technique. Implications for the intention-action gap discussion and for consumer ethics research are proposed.

**Keywords:** *Social Desirable Responding (SDR); Sustainable Consumption; Indirect Questioning Technique*

**Track:** Social Responsibility & Ethics