

Warm Glow Fades Away: How Temporal Focus Affects Ethical Consumption Choices

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Abstract

With the pervasiveness of sustainable products, consumers frequently face trade-offs between ethicality and performance in consumption choices. Knowing when consumers are most likely to prefer ethical products and services carries important implications for marketing decisions. We focus on whether consumers make more ethical choices for products and services for long-term versus short-term use. Six experiments show that long-term temporal focus (vs. short-term temporal focus) makes consumers less likely to choose ethical products (vs. high-performing products). This effect is robust across multiple product categories, ethical attributes, and operationalizations of temporal focus. The systematic shift occurs because consumers expect to derive less emotional utility (i.e., warm glow) from ethical products over time. We further show that directly challenging this lay belief or making warm glow salient at each use can mitigate this aversion for long-term ethical products.

Subject Areas: *Consumer Behaviour, Decision-Making*

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