

"Recyclable or Not?" Consumers Cognitive Mechanisms Involved in Recycling Household Waste

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Abstract

Governments encourage households to recycle their waste. It seems necessary to enrich research on individual barriers regarding recycling by looking at its cognitive dimension, including knowledge, representations and decision-making logic. The aim of this paper is to study the cognitive process that underlies waste recycling behaviour. A qualitative study, based on the observation of a recycling situation and on interviews with twenty-four consumers, highlights the recycling cognitive mechanisms. Using the categorization theory, it shows that individuals use their mental representations to classify waste around several cognitive categories and that this categorization can be disrupted by heuristics and cognitive biases as well as by situations of mental discomfort. Theoretically, the results enrich the categorization and behavioural decision theories. From a managerial and societal point of view, they help the stakeholders to implement actions in order to improve recycling.

Keywords: *Recycling; Waste; Categorization theory*

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