

Counteracting the Sustainability Liability: A Conceptual Model for Awareness-Based Debiasing

Emily Waltermann

WHU - Otto Beisheim School of Management

Anna-Karina Schmitz

WHU - Otto Beisheim School of Management

Cite as:

Waltermann Emily, Schmitz Anna-Karina (2025), Counteracting the Sustainability Liability: A Conceptual Model for Awareness-Based Debiasing. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 54th, (124535)

Paper from the 54th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, Spain, May 25-30, 2025



Counteracting the Sustainability Liability: A Conceptual Model for Awareness-Based Debiasing

Abstract:

This paper addresses the sustainability liability where consumers perceive sustainable products to be lower in performance and as a result may engage in overconsumption. Underlying this pattern is the zero-sum bias, which leads consumer to assume that improvements in product sustainability come at the expense of other attributes. While past research has focused on endorsements and framing to mitigate this effect, we propose a novel intervention rooted in mental contamination and correction, leveraging consumers' intrinsic motivation to avoid biased judgments. Our conceptual model suggests that increasing consumers' awareness of the zero-sum bias enhances perceived product performance and decreases overconsumption of sustainable products. This paper contributes to the literature by outlining a context-independent debiasing approach, equipping consumers with the skills to make unbiased decisions. Future research should empirically test our propositions and consider additional factors.

Keywords: sustainability liability, mental contamination, debiasing

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics