

Socio-economic status and people's acceptability of unsustainable consumption

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Abstract

People are increasingly encouraged to adopt more sustainable behaviors. But what determines whether people perceive unsustainable consumption choices made by others as more or less acceptable? We demonstrate that people judge the same unsustainable consumption choice as more acceptable when that choice is made by a lower- versus higher-income individual, even when a comparable sustainable consumption option does not impose any additional monetary costs. The evidence suggests that this effect is attributed to people's belief that environmental concerns are more of a luxury problem for lower- (vs. higher-) income individuals, accounting for differences in interpersonal judgments of immorality and environmental knowledge as alternative explanations. We find that this effect has important downstream consequences as people are less likely to support policy interventions promoting sustainable consumption when these interventions target lower- (vs. higher-) income individuals.

Keywords: Sustainability; Economic inequality; (Un)acceptability

Track: Social Responsibility Ethics