Understanding the Impact of Sustainability-Oriented Recommender Systems on Consumers' Choices

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Abstract:

Recommender systems (RS) have long been used by e-commerce platforms to boost revenue. However, RS designed to achieve other goals, such as nudging consumers towards sustainable choices, are emerging. While extant research has covered the effects of traditional systems (TRS) on consumer behaviour, research on the effects of sustainability-oriented systems (SRS) is sparse. Building upon RS and nudging theory, we investigate consumer responses to SRS (versus TRS and no RS) – and the mechanisms leading to their choices – using a 3-condition experiment in an online store simulation. We found that SRS significantly increase the purchase of sustainable products by enhancing awareness of these items and reducing the effort required to find them. Importantly, SRS do not affect the overall purchase volume. However, they amplify perceptions of being overwhelmed by sustainability talk. This research shows practitioners how to encourage sustainable consumption while pursuing business goals.

Keywords: Buying behaviour, Recommender systems, Sustainable consumption

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