

Barriers to Sustainable Consumer Behavior: How Consumers Overlook, Misread, and Legitimize Environmental Harm

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SPECIAL SESSION PROPOSAL

Barriers to Sustainable Consumer Behavior: How Consumers Overlook, Misread, and Legitimize Environmental Harm

Session Co-Chairs:

Yuqi Guo (Tilburg University, Submitting Chair) and Elena Bocchi (NEOMA Business School)

1 Overpurchase, Waste Neglect, and Waste Tolerance

Elena Bocchi* (NEOMA Business School), Eduardo B. Andrade (Imperial Business School)

2 Overconsumption and Judgements of Moral Character

Lukas Maier* (WU Vienna), Joseph Hyung-Soon (Columbia Business School), Gita Johar (Columbia Business School)

3 How Green Product Purchases Affect Consumer Preferences for Delivery Speed

Yuqi Guo* (Tilburg University), Jen Park (The University of British Columbia), David J. Hardisty (The University of British Columbia)

4 The Throwaway Divide: How and Why Disposal Behaviors Vary Across Consumers' Socioeconomic Status

Larissa França (Fundação Getúlio Vargas), Larissa Elmor (Fundação Getúlio Vargas), Yan Vieites (Fundação Getúlio Vargas), Eduardo B. Andrade* (Imperial Business School)

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Consumers often overlook or misjudge the environmental implications of their choices. This special session showcases new evidence on when, why, and how these misjudgments arise across the customer journey, leading consumers to easily engage in wasteful bulk buying, overconsumption, choice of unsustainable delivery options, and premature disposal.

In Paper 1 “Overpurchase, Waste Neglect, and Waste Tolerance,” **Bocchi and Andrade** show that consumers systematically overlook wastefulness (i.e., the possibility of not fully using or consuming a product) at the point of purchase, and prioritize other decision criteria. This neglect facilitates acquisition of bulkier (i.e., cheaper-per-unit yet potentially more wasteful) options even when these are correctly recognized as more wasteful, exacerbating waste generation. To counteract this tendency, the authors show that, unless already salient in the choice context, prompting consumers to think of wastefulness before choice effectively reduces bulk buying.

In Paper 2 “Overconsumption and Judgements of Moral Character,” **Maier, Hyung-Soon, and Johar** show that consumers differentially judge engagement in overconsumption practices (i.e., the excessive acquisition and consumption of products) based on the nature of the overconsumed products. They find that consumers largely condemn and judge overconsumption of *new* products as morally wrong but legitimize overconsumption of *secondhand* and *green* products because they perceive them as less harmful to the environment.

In Paper 3 “How Green Product Purchases Affect Consumer Preferences for Delivery Speed,” **Guo, Park, and Hardisty** show that consumers typically overlook the environmental impact of delivery choices and conveniently opt for faster (yet more polluting) options. However, they find that the acquisition of green products counteracts this: Buying green products activates environmental consideration to a greater extent, facilitating preference for slower delivery methods. Beyond green product purchases, the paper identifies additional interventions that can reliably nudge consumers toward slower and often greener delivery options.

In Paper 4 “The Throwaway Divide: How and Why Disposal Behaviors Vary Across Consumers’ Socioeconomic Status,” **França, Elmor, Vieites, and Andrade** identify socioeconomic status (SES) as an important yet underexplored driver of excessive waste generation. Three studies conducted in a highly unequal context show that high-SES consumers are more likely to discard products than their low-SES counterparts because, in addition to impacting them less financially, they judge discarding as less morally wrong, expect less negative social signaling, and perceive items as more damaged than what they actually are.

Taken together, these four papers uncover novel barriers to sustainable consumer behavior arising at different stages of the customer journey (i.e., acquisition, consumption, delivery, and disposal), explaining why and how consumers tend to engage in unsustainable practices.