

When the Green Lens Get Blurry: Consumer (Mis)Perceptions in Sustainability Judgments

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability-related judgments are often shaped by specific cues such as energy ratings, eco-labels etc., and are often distorted due to a cognitive and motivational biases, leading to inaccurate interpretations of products and their implications for the environment. Anchoring in recent research on heuristics and *biases in sustainability evaluations* (Winterich et. al. 2024), this special session takes a point of departure by bringing together five papers that examine distinct and novel types of misperceptions around sustainability and their downstream consequences. The papers in the session are thematically linked and investigate how consumers **i)** consumers rely on unrelated (visual) cues or features for sustainable decisions and judgments [papers #1, #2 and #4]; **ii)** fail to discern among sustainable product options [papers #4 and #5]; **iii)** inaccurately estimate the impact of sustainability [papers #3, #4 and #5]; and how **iv)** market forces influence with sustainability mis-judgments [all papers]. In a format of blitz talks and audience discussions, the session contributes to research on sustainability-related decision making and offers actionable policy insights, labeling standards, and marketplace design to bridge the divide between consumer perceptions and real environmental impact.

1 Product Size and Consumer Repair Decisions (Lu Fang*, Aradhna Krishna and Tatiana Sokolova) shows how consumers' sustainable decisions (repairs) are shaped by a visual attribute - perceived product size, such that users are more likely to repair larger sized products.

2 Green Walls of Orderly Homes: Unpacking Associations Between Spatial Order and Perceived Sustainability (Aruna Divya Tatavarthy* and Jingshi (Joyce) Liu) shows evidence for *orderly = sustainable* associations in shaping judgments of personal spaces, retail stores, and of people inhabiting those spaces.

3 Overestimating the Small, Underestimating the Big: Consumer Misestimation of Product Lifecycle Emissions (Tim Döring, Katherine Burson, Gergana Nenkov and Emir Efendić) demonstrates that consumers mis-estimate carbon emissions of different product life-cycle stages and tend to disproportionately prioritize minor improvements like packaging reductions over more impactful changes in agricultural practices.

4 How Products' Sustainability Features Shape Consumer Perceptions and Choices (Yufei Qiu*, Bernardo Andretti and Eduardo B. Andrade) highlights how marketers' under-emphasis of specific sustainability features (functionality) exacerbates the

sustainability-liability effect and hinders adoption of sustainable product alternatives in the market.

Using data from Dutch household panel and three studies, paper # 5 - **The Missing-label Effect: How Do Missing Sustainability Labels Affect Sustainability Perceptions?** (Riya Sa*, Tatiana Sokolova and Max Pachali) shows that consumers' ability to discriminate between products with different sustainability levels depends upon the proportion of no-label products in that category.