

The Environmental Crisis: Citizens or Consumers?

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Abstract

Marketing campaigns promoting sustainable consumption typically frame people as “consumers,” yet empirical work testing whether consumer vs. citizen role activation shifts values guiding environmental behavior remains scarce. Across four preregistered studies, we examine whether activating the citizen vs. consumer role changes the salience of self-transcendent (ST) and self-enhancement (SE) values and how these shifts affect sustainable consumption intentions. Study 1, using the Environmental Portrait Value Questionnaire, shows that the citizen role increases ST value salience, while the consumer role does not increase SE salience. Study 2 replicates these findings using machine-learning semantic similarity analysis of open-ended responses. Study 3 shows that the citizen role increases sustainable purchase intentions. Study 4 confirms that ST values mediate this effect. Results suggest that environmental communications should activate the citizen role to foster sustainable behavior.

Track: Consumer Behaviour