

Why Adding Green Doesn't Add Up: A Multicategory Investigation of the Negative Footprint Illusion

Karen Gorissen

BI Norwegian Business School

Bert Weijters

Ghent University

Acknowledgements:

Co-funded by the European Union

Cite as:

Gorissen Karen, Weijters Bert (2026), Why Adding Green Doesn't Add Up: A Multicategory Investigation of the Negative Footprint Illusion. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (134043)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



Why Adding Green Doesn't Add Up: A Multicategory Investigation of the Negative Footprint Illusion

Abstract

Consumers often misjudge the environmental impact of product bundles. When an environmentally certified option is added to a set of conventional products, many people perceive the total footprint as smaller, a bias called the Negative Footprint Illusion (NFI). We examine whether this illusion depends on the product domain or reflects a general psychological tendency. Using footprint judgments for 15 distinct product categories, we find that responses are driven by a single latent NFI factor with only minor category level deviations. A latent class analysis reveals two distinct consumer types; one consistently shows the illusion, while the other does not (high on compensatory green beliefs, environmental concern and education). These results demonstrate that the NFI is a domain general judgment bias that combines continuous and categorical variation. This clarifies who is most vulnerable and why eco information can at times lead to biased judgments.

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics