

From Ethical Features to Ethical Choices: The Role of Felt Specialness and Ethicality-as-Source-of-Specialness Beliefs

Sezin Ekinici

University of Amsterdam Business School

Carina Thuerridl

University of Amsterdam

Bernadette Kamleitner

WU Vienna

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Abstract

Ethical benefits can afford a sense of specialness that motivates ethical consumption, yet this benefit may not be guaranteed as ethical products become more commonplace. We introduce Ethicality-as-a-Source-of-Specialness (EASOS) beliefs, i.e., the belief that ethicality is a meaningful source of feeling special, and propose that ethical choices hinge on the strength of this belief. Accordingly, Studies 1a–b show that ethical benefits elicit feelings of specialness, which in turn increase ethical product preferences. Based on this, in Studies 2a–b, we develop and validate a scale of EASOS beliefs and show that these beliefs uniquely predict preference for ethical products. In Study 3, we demonstrate that ethical benefits increase product preference only among consumers with high EASOS beliefs. Together, our results indicate that ethicality can boost product preference via specialness, yet its influence depends on consumers' beliefs about its specialness-affording potential.

Track: Consumer Behaviour