



Extended Abstract | The 1st Research Innovations in Sustainable Marketing: A Global Virtual Symposium

Bridging the Gap: Consumer Choices and Sustainable Packaging

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Keywords: *construal level theory, choice architecture, eco-friendly labeling, nudge, psychological distance, purchase decisions, sustainable packaging*

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Extended Abstract: Climate change is a reality that affects all aspects of society, and consumers play a vital role in promoting sustainability initiatives. Any environmentally conscious decision made by consumers can significantly contribute to creating a market for sustainable marketing initiatives. Consumer choices shape marketing decisions, which, in turn, influence the type and nature of products that are available in the market. This creates a ripple effect that impacts the environment, as the products consumed later become a part of the waste generated post-consumption.

This paper presents a conceptual framework for when and how consumers can shift to environmentally friendly packaging. The foundation of the study is based on the nudge theory by [Thaler and Sunstein \(2008\)](#) which states that "a ... nudge is any attempt at influencing people's judgment, choice, or behavior in a predictable way (1), made possible because of cognitive biases in individual and social decision-making that pose barriers for people to perform rationally in their own interest, and (2) working by making use of those biases as an integral part of such attempts" ([Hansen, 2016](#), p. 2). Nudging is particularly useful when choices have a delayed effect and are difficult to make ([Thaler & Sunstein, 2008](#)). Since environmentally friendly packaging choices entail a series of complex considerations for consumers, such as pricing, quality concerns, and personal costs incurred, this study uses the basic

choice architecture ([Thaler & Sunstein, 2008](#)) to nudge consumers towards making desirable, environmentally friendly purchase decisions.

The paper argues that during the purchase decision, the consumer should have access to relevant information about the consequences and impact of their choices through strategic eco-friendly labeling of the product. This eco-friendly labeling frames relevant information in a simple way that highlights the values and attitudes that nudge people and impacts their purchase decisions. In addition, the consumer's psychological distance ([Trope & Liberman, 2010](#)) impacts the relationship between strategic eco-friendly labeling and purchase decisions of sustainably packaged products. Psychological distance refers to "the extent to which an object is removed from the self such as in likelihood of occurrence, in time, in geographical space, or in social distance" ([Trope and Liberman, 2010](#); [McDonald et al., 2015](#), p. 110). Previous studies have examined construal level theory, including psychological distance, impacting preferences and choices ([Kao et al., 2017](#)), judgments ([Yan et al., 2016](#)), and consumer decisions ([Aggarwal & Zhao, 2015](#)).

The paper proposes that the lower the psychological distance, the stronger the relationship between strategic eco-friendly labeling and the decision to purchase sustainably packaged products. Whereas,



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when the psychological distance is higher, the relationship between strategic eco-friendly labeling and the decision to purchase sustainably packaged products is weaker. The psychological distance of the consumer with respect to the value of sustainability and the attitude towards sustainably packaged products acts as a proposed moderator between eco-labeling and the purchase decisions of consumers. The key is the consumer's psychological distance from sustainability and sustainably packaged products. If sustainability is perceived to be close psychologically, that is, the psychological distance is lower, the positive relationship between eco-labeling and purchase decision will get stronger as the consumer will feel its impact deeply, and the concern will be valid and strong. Whereas, if sustainability is perceived as psychologically distant, that is, the psychological distance is higher, the consumer may have a more abstract understanding of sustainability and its impact, and it may not be as real a concern for them, and they may feel discouraged to act, making it more likely for them not to purchase a sustainably packaged product.

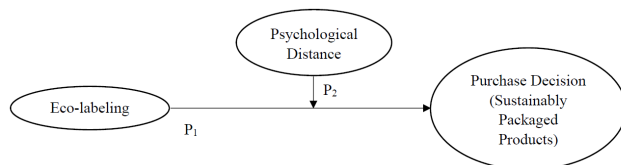


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

This conceptual paper has important implications for marketers, advertisers, and policymakers, as it highlights the psychological process behind purchasing decisions and behavioral change. The proposed framework assesses consumer purchase decisions by applying choice architecture, broadening our understanding of consumer decision-making in choosing sustainable packaging. The study proposes that psychological distance can act as a potential barrier or enabler that either inhibits or promotes environmentally conscious decision-making

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