

The role of communication in the adoption of sustainable practices

Sustainability communication has become a cornerstone for both firms and consumers in today's business landscape. One of the key challenges firms face is effectively conveying sustainability issues and practices to both internal and external audiences. As a result, firms are increasingly recognizing the pivotal role of sustainability communication in their strategies to influence consumer behavior (Yan et al., 2023; Sipil et al., 2021).

The literature distinguishes between two types of behaviors in the sustainable domain: prosocial behavior and sustainable behavior (Yan et al., 2021). Prosocial behavior refers to voluntary, helpful actions intended to benefit others (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Batson & Powell, 2003). In contrast, sustainable behavior focuses on actions that benefit the environment and its human inhabitants (Callicott, 1995).

Developing sustainable practices involves navigating complex processes to shape a better future for both consumers and businesses. Within this context, communication emerges as a driving force essential for fostering reasonable and impactful sustainable development. By emphasizing the role of communication, firms can align their strategies with the broader goals of sustainability, ensuring meaningful engagement with stakeholders.

This work centres on how to promote the adoption of sustainable practices while varying communication strategies. In particular, we are interested in examining how individuals respond to firms' communication on green products; we are focusing on how pro-social behavior can be triggered by changing the framing of the message. Specifically, we are exploring how psychologically distant messages can be made more relevant by providing sensory stimuli, such as haptic ones. This investigation involves running multiple experiments on various samples of European customers.

Recently, there has been a surge of interest in both marketing and psychology concerning the impact of sensory experiences on judgment and decision-making. This has led to the development of sensory marketing, a field that explores how sensory perceptions influence consumer behavior. Our focus within this domain is on the role of haptic experiences in digital environments, particularly the effect of vicarious touch (Luangrath et al., 2022) in fostering sustainable consumer behaviors.

Additionally, we are collaborating with a nationally relevant multi-utility company to conduct further field experiments focused on message framing (time-framed, data-framed). Data are collected within a proprietary gamified platform where examining responses to alternative framing will be possible.

To rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches, the project employs advanced experimental methodologies:

1. **Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs):** These ensure that the observed effects are attributable to the specific framing or sensory interventions rather than external factors.
2. **Quasi-Experimental Designs:** Methods like **Difference-in-Differences (DiD)** and **Propensity Score Matching (PSM)** are used to analyze observational data where randomization is impractical. These techniques help estimate causal effects by controlling for confounding variables.

By combining both field and lab experiments, the research aims to generate robust, actionable insights that are directly applicable to real-world contexts. The recruited researcher will play a pivotal role in designing these experiments, analyzing the data, and ensuring that the findings contribute meaningfully to both academic knowledge and practical sustainability strategies.

Plan of activities

The researcher will contribute to the research design of the experiments aimed at investigating the role of sensory stimuli in triggering the adoption of sustainable practices.

He/she will help design the experiments in the adopted electronic interfaces (e.g. Qualtrics) and facilitate the data collection.

He/she will conduct the data analysis using Generalized Linear Models and Mediation and Moderation models as implemented in the Process Platform.

He/she will contribute to uploading the results of these experimentations on the Amelia platform.

He/she will help design various field experiments in cooperation with a national multi-utility company and facilitate the data collection.

He/she will conduct the data analysis using causal inference approaches.

He will contribute to the writing of the papers and conference proceedings stemming from the above-mentioned research.

Finally, he/she will contribute to uploading the results of these experimentations on the Amelia platform.