

Embracing sustainability: the unrevealed oxymoron?

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Proposal for a Colloquium at the CS 2022: Communicating Sustainability 2022 – Glasgow Hub

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Title

Embracing sustainability: the unrevealed oxymoron?

<https://easychair.org/cfp/CS2022-UofG>

Sustainability is a word that has recently been ‘in fashion’ which, in its wider definition, implies meeting the needs of today without compromising the resources of the future. It is equally applied throughout disparate industries, companies, brands and to indicate positive consumer habits. However, just as with the consumer-behaviour gap which was identified in the last century (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000) in relation to what was then termed as ethical behaviour, there seems to be a displacement between the professed engagement desire of citizens and consumers with sustainable actions and their actual activities. This colloquium presents different perspectives on this issue which, although well researched, has not yet been resolved. One of the central themes related to sustainable discourse is linked to climate change and gas central heating in homes is one of the areas at the forefront of this issue. The transition process has been identified as a particular time for resistance to change towards sustainability and as such, one of the presentations investigates transition in the domestic heating arena within the specific context of the Netherlands and its journey towards climate neutrality. The second presentation looks at creative approaches to breaking down the barrier of resistance towards sustainable choices for avid consumers of fashion garments by inducing co-creative options between consumers and fashion brands. The third intervention examines the research and literature which underpins the wider theoretical area of sustainability by reviewing available sources and categorizing them by behavioral approach. This presentation highlights the conclusions from research related to consumer voluntary engagement in, often upwardly differential price points, attached to environmentally responsible products. Finally, supply chain transparency and the

resistance that fashion brands and companies have shown in this area is highlighted with some possible solutions advanced. These presentations represent four complementary approaches to the theme of resistance within the drive towards a more sustainable future.

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Methods to overcome resistance of homeowners to making their homes natural gas-free

The objective of being climate neutral by 2050 can only be achieved if all homes in the Netherlands are natural gas-free by then. Heating homes is responsible for more than 21.3% of CO₂ emissions in the Netherlands. Despite this urgency, unfortunately, not all home owners immediately make their homes natural gas-free. Homeowners may know that change is necessary and/or also want to change, but many of them experience all kinds of personal resistance in this transition process to a natural gas-free home. Resistance is defined as a motivational state in which people are satisfied with their current attitudes and behavior and therefore resist attempts to change them (Knowles & Linn, 2004). Some possible examples of reasons for consumer resistance, that companies involved in the energy transition mention, are, e.g., lack of funds, financial uncertainty due to fears of possible cheaper innovations in the near future, doubts whether the investment will really help as other countries do not do enough yet, not knowing which advisors to trust, not feeling capable to judge alternative cost estimates from different suppliers, where to start or simply too much hassle. In order to actually take steps, people (1) have to be aware of the need to adopt alternatives to natural gas, (2) have the motivation to contribute to the solution, and (3) actually take action. For this to happen, it is important that people (4) have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to do what is necessary and (5) experience that the physical and social context in which the behavior takes place is adequately organized and socially supported. Resistance can arise within all these steps and cause gaps between, for example, motivations and intentions, or between intentions and behavior.

There is currently, however, a knowledge gap on this topic in relation to this transition process. Our, two year, study will map all possible personal resistances in the context of making one's own home natural gas-free, identify the impact each of these have on resistance in the energy transition process and which interventions are most promising to prevent or overcome them. This is useful

for companies that are involved in the transition, for homeowners, education of future professionals and for scientific knowledge development.

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Co-creation and Ikigai to implement sustainability with consumers in the fashion industry

Focus on the background of the fashion industry and the current market environment we offer an understanding of how the consumer can adopt the sustainable products that the companies are offering in the fashion industry (Cervellon & Drylie-Carey, 2021). Fashion and sustainability we far long considered as not compatible terms. The call for climate action has been perceived as a challenge for the future of the fashion industry but in the recent years is a clear change of the mindset in the industry to identify sustainability as one of the best opportunities to add value to the to the brands while making a difference in the planet.

The Oxford dictionary states that fashion “is a popular style of clothes, hair etc. at a particular time or place”. Therefore, fashion is about design and change. Change comes from the old French word “changier” from the latin “cambiare, cambire” that means “to barter and exchange”. Therefore, the root of the real change is not just in the substitution of things anymore. The real and meaningful change is about exchange and barter. Barter used to be the basis of the human economy before capitalism, and it is necessary to recover some of its ethos to set a sustainable strategy for this new era. Implementing barter requires some reciprocity and requires mutual coincidences between the wants of the traders. Applied to the actual moment, it implies that instead of offering a sustainable approach to the consumer, we need to design a co-creation technique that helps the brands to implement sustainability with the consumer.

The authors of this proposal have a background of applying co-creation techniques for common good purposes. The Ikigai is a Japanese concept meaning “a reason for being” and is found on the intersection where your passions and talents converge with the things that the world needs and is willing to pay for. Ikigai can allow the companies to design a sustainable strategy with their costumers (Nordgren & Schonthal, 2022). The sustainable products that brand offer should match the four categories of Ikigai:

- What you love: a stylish, wearable, and durable design
- What the world needs: minimizing the environmental impact (raw material and waste)
- What you are good at: producing quality and comfortable clothes that can provide joy and last more than one season
- What you can be paid for: matching the prize of the product, with the revenues of the company and the incomes of the workers and suppliers.

We propose and experience of co-creation with the new generations of leaders for the industry through the Erasmus + SFES project (Sustainable Fashion and Employability Skills) that aims to identify and provide to the students the skills for facilitating their employability while making the fashion industry more sustainable. With a group of 30 students from 5 different academic institutions, we are planning to co-design this approach with the aim to help them to identify the skills that can match the requirements of the brands and the costumers to co-create the future of our planet together (Han, 2022).

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Embracing sustainability: The Value of Sustainability

Objective: This contribution outlines the development of the articles published so far on consumers' willingness to pay a premium for environmentally responsible products.

Method: The Web of Science (WoS) database was consulted to identify the relevant articles on the subject. The resulting sub-file consisted of 571 articles. These articles were analyzed using bibliometric software (bibliometrix / biblioshiny and Vosviewer). This involved analysis of the evolution over time, categories of literature, the main authors, articles and countries within the field, bibliographical linking and co-citation analysis. Subsequently, six review articles were selected in order to gain insight into the state of affairs within this scientific part of the literature.

Results: The scientific discussion about the value of sustainability seems to be of a relatively recent date (approximately from 2004). This discussion is only a very small part of the scientific discussion about sustainability or that about valuation. The discussion about the value of sustainability is mainly conducted within the sustainability and economic literature, and very little within the psychological and/or marketing literature. The literature seems to be divided into three clusters: a label cluster, a planned behavior cluster and a discrete choice cluster. In particular, use is made of a fairly stale psychological 'coat rack theory' about planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the discrete choice approach derived from economics (Train, 2009).

Conclusions, limitations and recommendations: Although the attention for the value of sustainability in the literature is increasing, this literature still seems to be in an 'embryonic stage'. Especially from a psychological and marketing point of view, there still seems to be quite a bit of profit to be made. After all, within the psychological literature theoretical developments have not stood still since the development of the theory about planned behavior.

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Supply chain resistance in the fashion industry

Consumers have often been identified as a pressure point within the sustainability debate for the fashion industry as the overconsumption of mainly, what is now termed “fast fashion” (a business model based on replicating high end fashion designs massed produced at low cost (Saxon, 2021)¹), has been identified as a main cause for environmental harm due to the high levels of energy, pollution and sometimes poor worker conditions it takes to produce these garments. There is also their contribution to the ever increasing landfill issue that the world is experiencing on a global level where these often cheap and poorly made clothes are disposed of to take into account. However, there is a more industry focused area which is placed at the front end of the fashion process, which is now emerging as an area which needs to be addressed when investigating sustainability within this context; the supply chain. The focus has now shifted slightly and, although the consumer debate has in no way been resolved, this area related to the life cycle of a

¹ Saxon, K. (2021), Complete Fast Fashion Guide – Definitions, Problems, Examples, Solutions, <https://thevou.com/fashion/fast-fashion/>

garment has emerged as worthy of investigation. High profile Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as *Fashion Revolution*² have been at the forefront of disrupting the status quo in this area and forcing fashion companies and brands to provide greater transparency in their supply chain strategies. In 2017, they published the first Fashion Transparency Index (<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/transparency/>) which included information about supply chains which before had been closely guarded by the companies themselves. This presentation reviews the prominent academic research in this area and shares the main trends related to this resistance to complete supply chain transparency for fashion brands and offers some possible solutions.

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² <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/>