

When Extremely Good is not Enough for Sustainability Disclosures: An Abstract



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Abstract The wide array of sustainability labels used in retail environments across the globe is staggering. One source indicates that there are currently 463 labels used in 199 countries across 25 industries and the number of labels used is anticipated to grow (Ecolabel Index 2018). Despite this widespread labeling, however, consumers still express confusion over the green attributes of products, suggesting that the information presented on these product labels is frequently insufficient and that this may be a contributing factor to unsustainable choices (Frazier 2007).

We draw from schema congruity theory and the information disclosure literature to examine sustainability labels with scale ratings on product perceptions and purchase outcomes. This study presents sustainability disclosures, in an absolute format, that incorporate life cycle assessments (cf. GoodGuide) and utilize a scoring scheme in a comparative context—more accurately depicting a purchase scenario in a retail environment in which multiple products (vs. a single products) are presented. Therefore, in these situations, the provision of objective sustainability information at the product level (e.g., overall indices or levels that are attribute-specific across a product category) should influence consumers' product evaluations.

Our findings demonstrate that implementing a sustainability disclosure system informs consumers in status quo retail environments and enables them to make more sustainable decisions. Findings suggest that the level of schema congruity must be increased so that the sustainability level is consistent with consumers' expectations within specific product categories. However, consumers' perceived efficacy and concerns with social desirability must be considered because they serve an important moderating role in the effects of sustainability disclosures on product

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evaluations. In summary, the provision of sustainability disclosures for all products within a category may provide substantial benefits to manufacturers, retailers, consumers, and the environment.

Keywords Schema congruity · Category expectations · Sustainability disclosure · Social desirability

References Available Upon Request