

Ask yourself: Will you help the environment?

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Whether it's recycling, composting or buying environmentally friendly products, guilt can be a strong motivator—not just on Earth Day.

Now, research from Concordia University's John Molson School of Business published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, proves that even just asking ourselves, or predicting, whether we will engage in sustainable shopping behaviour can increase the likelihood of following through—especially when there's an audience.

Lead author, marketing professor Onur Bodur explains that, "this is because asking people to predict whether they will undertake a certain behaviour increases their probability of actually doing so. It's what's called the 'self-prophecy effect.' Our research shows that that effect is even stronger for a person who defines him or herself by social ties and peer opinions."

The study demonstrates how the self-prophecy effect can be used as a marketing technique to increase shoppers' preference for environmentally friendly products. "While the self-prophecy effect has been applied in a consumer context before, our study is the first to examine whether it can actually make buyers more sustainability-conscious," notes Bodur.

Bodur and Concordia co-authors, Kimberly Duval and Bianca Grohmann, showed consumers an ad asking them whether they would purchase [environmentally friendly](#) products. Those who were exposed to the prediction message were much more likely to make [sustainable](#)

[consumption](#) decisions later on when given the choice, compared to those exposed to an ad with a neutral message.

The authors then took the study one step further by introducing "watching eyes" alongside the ads. "We added an image of a face or group of faces appearing to make eye contact with the reader. This increased consumer preference for sustainable products even further," explains Bodur.

Again, these effects were stronger for consumers who define their identity based on the perceptions of others in their social circle, which is especially common in Eastern cultures.

The results of this study suggest that introducing a prediction request and audience cue into a social marketing campaign will help increase sales of sustainable products, while potentially boosting other pro-environmental and pro-social behaviours.

"The fact that these effects are stronger for those consumers who define themselves based on others' perceptions shows that this type of marketing strategy could prove especially useful in cultures where social relationships are central to one's identity. That's especially useful news for emerging Asian economies that are particularly plagued by pollution and environmental threats," says Bodur.

More information: www.springer.com/social+science+ethics/journal/10551

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