



The darker side of sustainable consumer behavior (and some light in the darkness)

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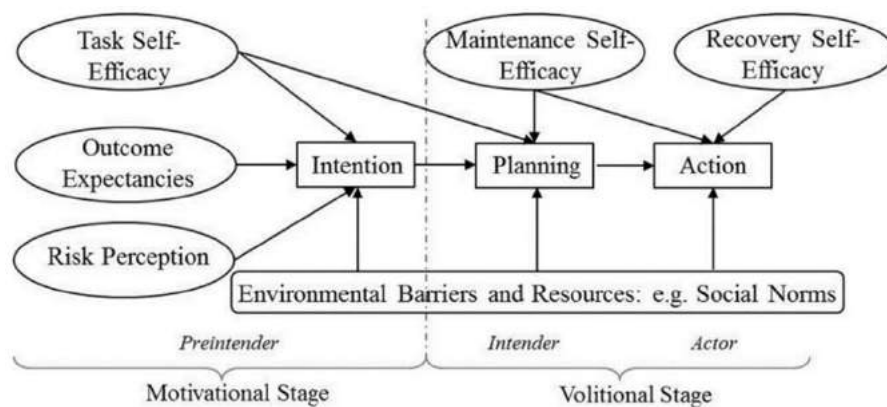


The problem

- 80% concerned about sustainability
- 50% positive attitudes to sustainable behavior
- 5% actually do
- Huge attitude behavior gap
- There are potential markets for many goods and services, but they materialize very slowly.

- People expect the 80% to be the market potential for sustainable consumption,
- Or at least the 50% with stated intentions.

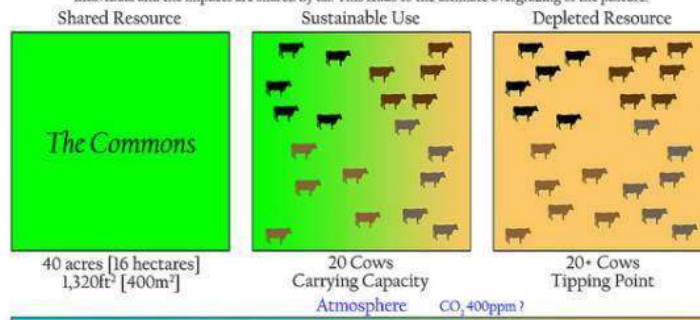
The traditional answer



It does not work well.

The Tragedy of the Commons

Imagine an open pasture shared by multiple cattle owners. Each owner increases their herd to maximize their benefit. With an unregulated resource this is "logical" since the benefit is enjoyed by the individual and the impacts are shared by all. This leads to the ultimate overgrazing of the pasture.



The Tragedy of the Commons applies to numerous environmental, economic and social phenomena and has particular relevance to greenhouse gas regulation related to global warming.

Hardin, G. (1968) The Tragedy of the Commons Science 162, 1243-1248



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Sustainable choices

- Are harmed by mental fatigue.
- Are harmed by our hunger for social status.
- Are harmed by our tendency to copy others
- And some are harmed by our propensity for disgust.

"Every weakness has its strength"

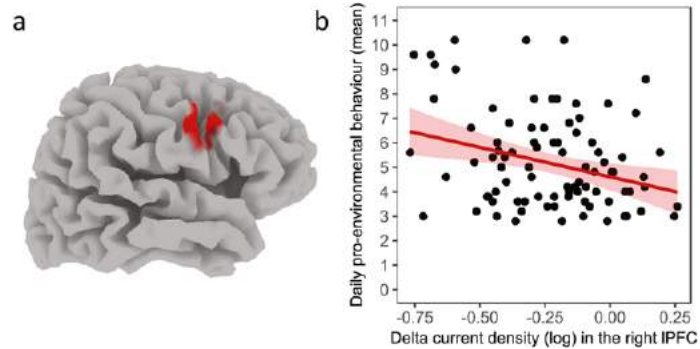


Johan Cruyff
Famous Dutch Philosopher, 20th century

Sustainable choices

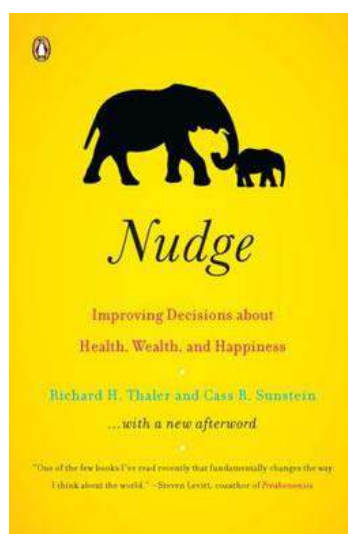
- Are harmed by stress and mental fatigue.
- Are harmed by our hunger for social status.
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Sustainable choice is associated with self-control brain activity !

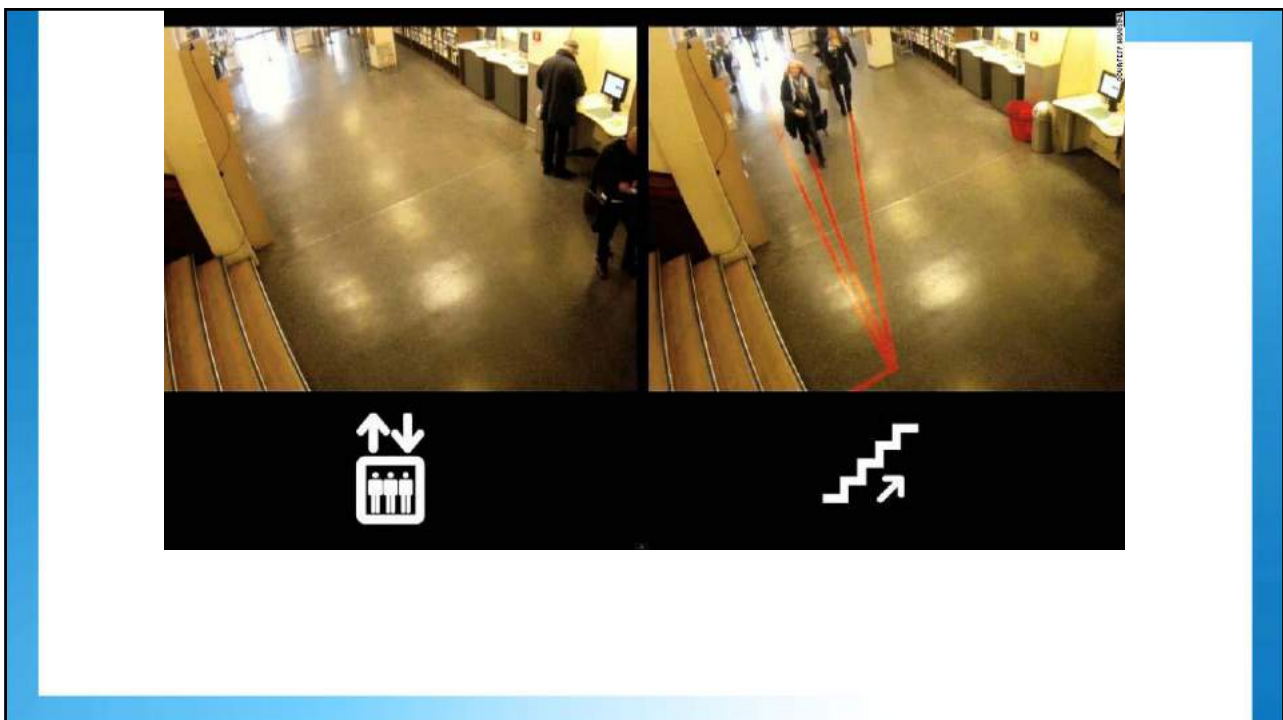
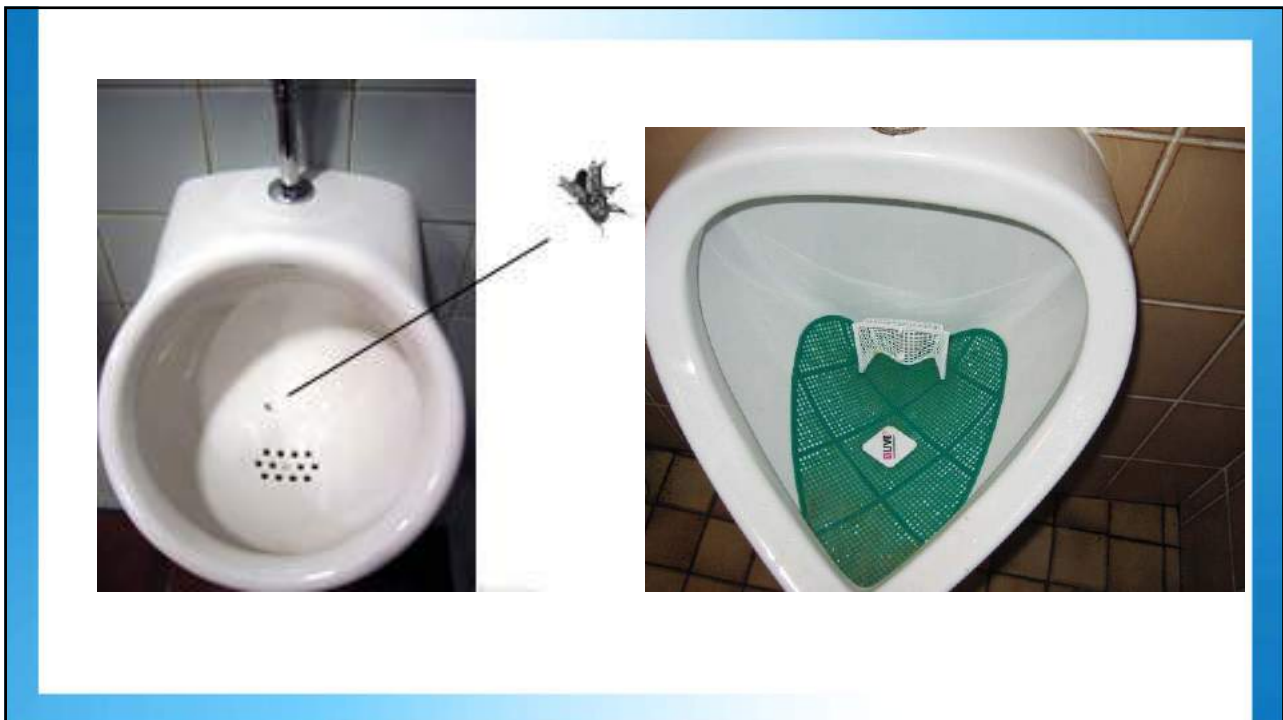


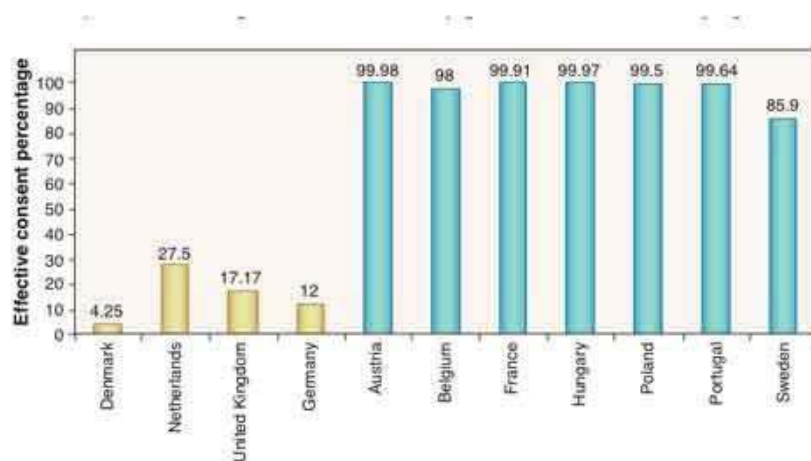
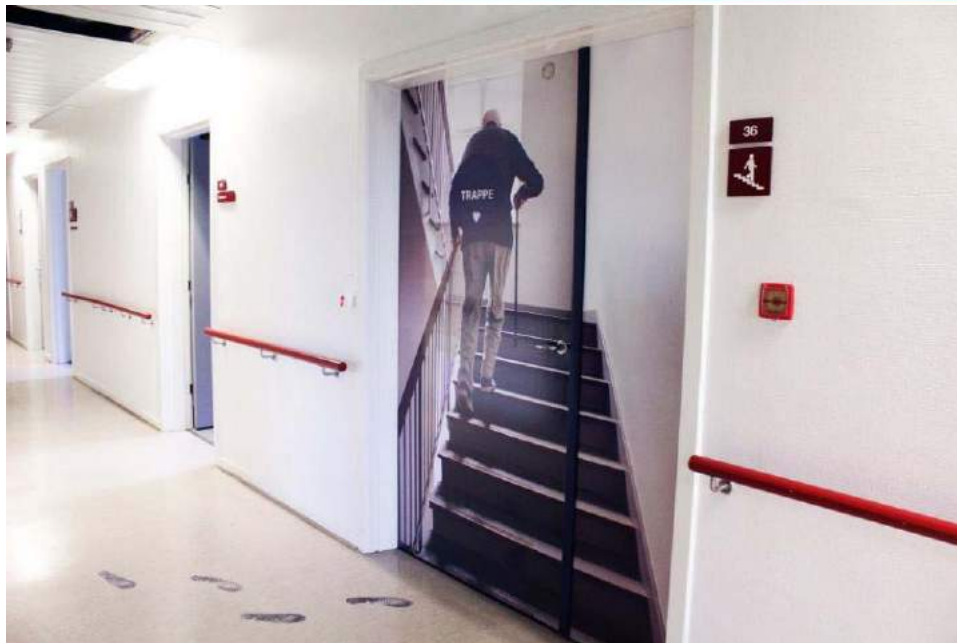
Baumgartner, T., Langenbach, B. P., Gianotti, L. R., Müri, R. M., & Knoch, D. (2019). Frequency of everyday pro-environmental behaviour is explained by baseline activation in lateral prefrontal cortex. *Scientific reports*, 9(1), 9.

How to use mental load to our benefit?



Richard Thaler, University of Chicago
Nobelprize in Economics 2017





Effective consent rates, by country. Explicit consent (opt-in, gold) and presumed consent (opt-out, blue).

Johnson, EJ and Goldstein, D (2003), Do Defaults Save Lives?, *Science*, 302 (5649), 1338-1339



Van Ittersum, Koert, and Brian Wansink (2012). Plate Size and Color Suggestibility: The Delboeuf Illusion's Bias on Serving and Eating Behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(2), 215-228.



Wansink, B., Just, D., Hanks, A. S., & Smith, L. E. (2013). Pre-sliced fruit in school cafeterias children's selection and intake. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 44 (5), 477-480.



Kroese, F. M., Marchiori, D. R., & de Ridder, D. T. D. (2016). Nudging healthy food choices: a field experiment at the train station. *Journal of Public Health*, 38 (2), 133-137.

Sustainable choices

- Are harmed by mental fatigue.
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2. We seek status



Costly signal



Could this small electric Honda be status consumption?

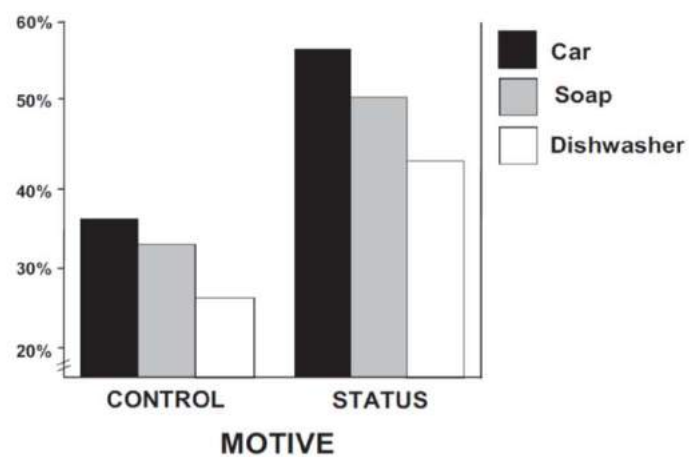


Figure 1. Percentage of people choosing proenvironmental “green” products over more luxurious nongreen counterpart products as a function of active motive (Study 1).

Griskevicius, Vladas, Joshua M. Tybur, and Bram Van den Bergh (2010) “Going green to be seen: status, reputation, and conspicuous conservation.” *Journal of Personality and social Psychology*, 98, 392-402

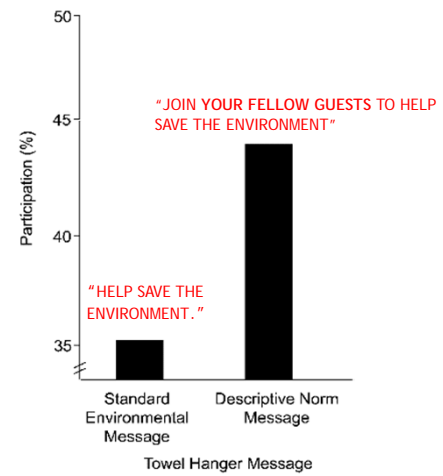
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3. We imitate others

- Imitation ensures social acceptance
- What others do becomes 'normal'.

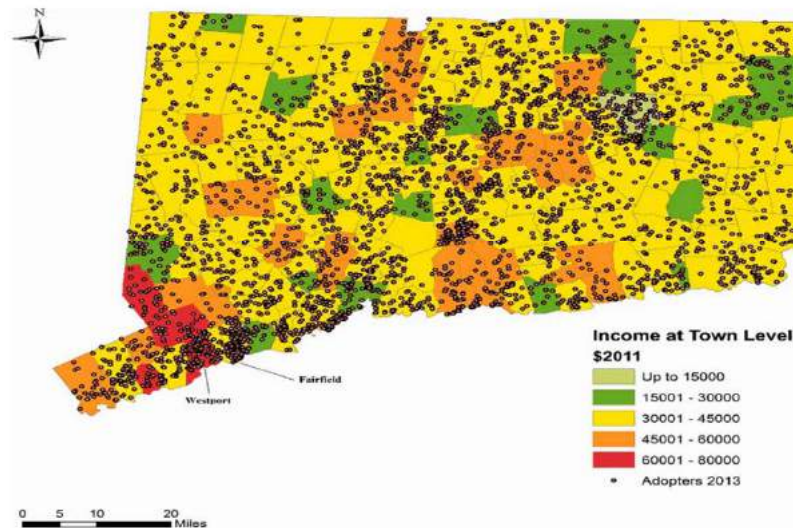
Figure 2 Towel Reuse Rates as a Function of Sign in Room (Experiment 1)



Goldstein, Cialdini, Griskevicius (2008), A Room with a Viewpoint: Using Social Norms to Motivate Environmental Conservation in Hotels, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35, 3, 472-482



Geographic distribution of rooftop solar panels in Connecticut (2013)



Graziano & Gillingham (2015). Spatial patterns of solar photovoltaic system adoption. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 15, 4, 815-839.

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4. We are easily disgusted

Sharing economy
Access based services

Would preserve a lot of resources (eg., number of cars needed)



"I would not like it ... putting my hands where everyone put theirs ... and you never know....

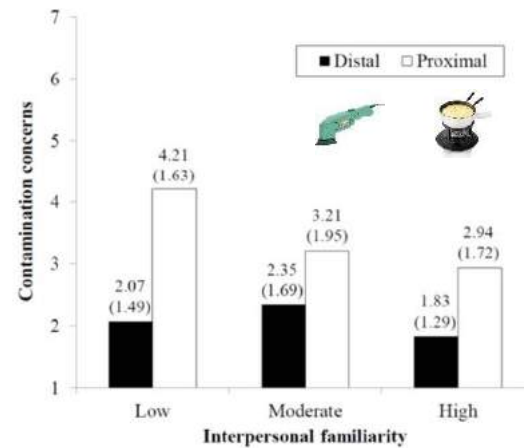
The tissues, diseases, yuck no!

There might be a guy who coughed on the steering wheel [of the shared car] the whole day, and then you must put your hands on it!" (potential car-sharing user)

Hazée, Delcourt, Van Vaerenbergh, & Warlop (2019), Sharing Goods? Yuck, No! An Investigation of Consumers' Contamination Concerns About Access-Based Services, *Journal of Service Research*, forthcoming.

Figure 2: Consumers' Contamination Concerns in ABS as a Function of Product-Body

Proximity and Interpersonal Familiarity (Study 2)



Disgust much reduced when rental company has high brand name recognition.

Conclusion

- Trying to CONVINCE consumers to make sustainable choices is an uphill battle.
- Lot of factors work against consideration of the future of the planet when we make our choices
- But try to use the weaknesses that people have as a strength.
 - Their lack of mental capacity
 - Their need for status
 - Their tendency to imitate each other
 - Their confidence what is familiar.
- If marketing as a discipline wants to contribute to 'making a better society', we will have to do it by understanding and utilizing the weaknesses of the consumer, and using them as strengths.