

Consumers' role in addressing plastic pollution

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Pollution from plastics causes the death of millions of ocean seabirds and marine animals and likely affects human health. This calls for joint efforts among multiple stakeholders to address global plastic pollution.

Among all stakeholders in plastic pollution, consumers play a critical role as the ultimate driver of the consumption and production of plastics. The empowered consumers can promote eco-friendly and socially responsible consumption and, through their consumption behavior, help towards a solution to reduce and eliminate plastic pollution (De Marchi et al., 2020).

Much of the existing literature on plastic pollution concerning consumer behavior predominately focuses on psychological factors, such as consumers' awareness of plastic pollution, attitudes towards environmentally conscious behavior, and willingness of behavioral changes (e.g. Barnes, 2019). The journal *Resources, Conservation & Recycling* has accommodated one of the largest sources of the literature on these topics around consumer behaviors related to plastic pollution (e.g.

Khan et al., 2019).

Despite the extensive literature on the psychological factors of consumer behavior related to plastic pollution, knowledge gaps still exist, particularly in social and technological factors.

Consumers are social beings, and their consumption behavior is largely influenced by others, such as their peers and family. Research on social influence suggests that social norms are a powerful force influencing and directing human behavior in public (Dwyer et al., 2015). Consistent with this, marketing and retailing literature argue that social influencers (e.g. opinion leaders and celebrities) and social networks play an increasingly significant role in advertising and promoting sales of products and services, communicating and spreading the values of brands. Further, the communication literature suggests that, with strong and salient message cues (e.g. normative messages for eco-friendly consumption or against overconsumption of plastic products), the recipients are more likely to engage and comply with the message requests (e.g. adoption of eco-friendly and socially responsible consumption behavior). However, the literature on the effect of social influence on consumer behavior towards plastic products and waste is still limited.

From a technological perspective, with the development of information and communication technologies, digital platforms, online social media, and IoT (Internet of Things) gain momentum in socializing, engaging, and shaping every aspect of consumers' decision-making and consumption process (Cao, et al., 2021). The application of these technologies can help facilitate environmental friendly consumer behavior to mitigate plastic pollution. At the same time, unintended consequences might also exist through mechanisms such as rebound effect. Nevertheless, our understanding on how technology has changed and can change consumer behavior related to plastic pollution is largely unknown.

To fill these knowledge gaps, this special issue aims to explore the role of consumers in tackling plastic pollution. While contributions examining psychological factors of consumer behavior related to plastic pollution are still welcome, we particularly focus on studies investigating how social influence and technologies can engage, mobilize, and empower consumers towards a strong eco-friendly and socially responsible consumption culture in society, and the subsequent effects on the reduction and elimination of plastic pollution. From social influence theory and socially responsible consumption literature, we hope to understand better how consumers are influenced by social norms and other institutional guidelines and engaged in sustainable/eco-friendly/socially responsible consumer behavior. From integrative theories of behavior, social media engagement, and sustainability literature, we hope to understand better how social media networks and other modern technologies can engage consumers in addressing plastic pollution.

The list below provides example research topics we are interested in this special issue:

- Social influence on sustainable/eco-friendly/socially responsible consumer behavior associated with plastic pollution

- Institutional influence on sustainable/eco-friendly/socially responsible consumer behavior associated with plastic pollution
- Influence of social media and online networks on sustainable/eco-friendly/socially responsible consumer behavior associated with plastic pollution
- Consumer engagement in fighting against plastic pollution and sustainable/eco-friendly/socially responsible consumption
- Consumers' compliance with social influence or social contract in terms of sustainable/eco-friendly/socially responsible consumption
- Consumer leadership for the development and marketing of sustainable/eco-friendly/socially responsible products and services

Manuscript Preparation and Submission

A Virtual Special Issue (VSI) is an online-only grouping of Special Issue articles traditionally assigned to a single Special Issue. The articles in a VSI will be assigned a unique identifier and published in a regular journal issue. The unique identifier allows to simultaneously adding the article to a VSI in ScienceDirect.com. Articles grouped together in a VSI retain their original citation details. A VSI speeds up the publication of individual articles as, unlike the publication process for conventional Special Issue articles, a VSI does not need to wait for the final article to be ready before publication.

A detailed submission guideline is available as “Guide for Authors” at: <http://www.journals.elsevier.com/resources-conservation-and-recycling>. All manuscripts and any supplementary material should be submitted through the online editorial system (<https://www.editorialmanager.com/recycl>). The authors must select “SI: Plastic and consumer” in the submission process.

Important Dates

- Full paper submission deadline: May 5, 2021
- Final decision notification: February 5, 2022
- Publication: As soon as accepted (VSI)

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