

Department of Marketing



Research Seminars Series

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Eco-Movement Echoes: Tracing Sustainability Shifts with GPS Data

Abstract: Household emissions account for approximately two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions, highlighting the critical need to understand and promote sustainable consumer behaviors. Previous research has identified key drivers of sustainable behaviors, such as environmental awareness, social norms, and perceived benefits (e.g., White et al., 2019; Hardisty & Weber, 2009). However, a significant intention-behavior gap remains, where consumers' stated intentions often fail to translate into concrete actions (e.g., Carrington et al., 2014). This study leverages device-level GPS data and Places of Interest (POI) information to measure observed consumer behavior and develop a novel index quantifying sustainability at the individual level. The index captures both emissions reductions and diverse sustainable and unsustainable activities that can be tracked through geolocation data. More specifically, this work analyzes the role of shocks like eco-movements in enhancing consumer awareness and adoption of sustainable practices, with a particular focus on investigating the influence of Greta Thunberg's 2019 environmental activism among those physically exposed to the event. Utilizing device-level mobile GPS location data and analyzing Places of Interest (POI) information, we employ a unique approach to track consumer participation and exposure to these events and explore how and where consumers engage in sustainable activities. Preliminary results suggest that the impact of such events varies significantly by type of exposure (active participation versus passive exposure), and type of behavior (e.g., renewable versus fossil-based energy use, sustainable versus fast-fashion consumption, and low-impact versus fast-food dining choices). These effects dissipate over time, returning to baseline levels after about 10 weeks. These insights shed light on the influence of Eco-Movement events and initiatives and provide valuable implications for policymakers and marketers seeking to promote environmental sustainability effectively.