

Disentangling the Relationship between Sustainable Consumption and Psychological Well-Being

Authors : Isabel Carrero, Raquel Redondo, Carmen Valor

Abstract : An unclosed issue in sustainable consumption (SC) literature is the relationship between SC and well-being. This paper seeks to address three limitations in past research. First, well-being has been measured as a single-faceted construct. However, other authors have defended the need to broaden the well-being construct since it goes beyond the emotional experiences and life satisfaction. By examining the relationship between SC and the multifaceted construct of psychological well-being, past contradictory results may be reconciled. To illustrate, past studies have shown that sustainable consumers experience negative emotions when they become aware of the harm that human beings inflict on the planet but they realize they have limited power to solving the problem or when they find limited alternatives or useful information to make sustainable decisions. Thus, these experiences may negatively affect the dimension of well-being 'environmental mastery'. However, as past studies have demonstrated that sustainable consumers feel meaningful, their assessment of the dimension 'purpose in life' would be positive. Thus, we need to understand how SC impinge on the different facets of psychological well-being, in order to better understand the relationship between SC and well-being. Another limitation of past research is that most studies failed to distinguish among different pro-environmental actions under SC (i.e., boycotting, buycotting) among others. For instance, activists have been found to experience higher levels of well-being and sense of meaning than less committed sustainable consumers but also burnt-out and social rejection, which should affect negatively the dimension of 'positive relations'. Finally, the influence of gender has been overlooked in the literature of SC and well-being when it has been identified consistently as a moderator variable in SC. Therefore, this study aims to (1) investigate the effect of SC on the six facets of psychological well-being, (2) distinguish between conventional SC behaviors vs. activism to examine whether these behaviors influence psychological well-being differently (3) and test gender as a moderator variable. It does so by surveying 861 individuals. This paper contributes to existing literature by showing that the relationship between well-being and SC is more intricate than it has been presented in previous literature, as it depends on the facet, the type of behavior carried out and gender.

Keywords : activism, gender, psychological well-being, structural equation modelling, sustainable consumption

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