

Self-Construals, Personal Values, and Sustainable Consumption: Cross-Cultural Evidence from India and the United States



Volkan DOĞAN¹
Merve DOĞAN²

Abstract

Though sustainable consumption has become a popular research topic in marketing, its manifestation in different cultural settings has not received much research attention. Through three studies anchored in self-construal theory, we develop and test hypotheses about the roles played by the independent and the interdependent self-construals in affecting sustainable consumption in India and the United States. We show that sustainable consumption intentions of the independent self-construal consumers tend to be lower than their interdependent self-construal counterparts. We also show that self-transcendence values mediate the self-construal - sustainable consumption relationship. We discuss our findings, the theoretical and managerial implications of our work, and offer future research questions.

Keywords: Independent self-construal, interdependent self-construal, self-construal, self-transcendence, sustainable consumption.

¹ **Sorumlu Yazar/ Corresponding Author:** Doç. Dr., Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İktisadi İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, vodogan@ogu.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5440-9440>

² Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Bilecik Şeyh Edebali Üniversitesi Uygulamalı Bilimler Fakültesi, merve.dogan@bilecik.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0695-4177>

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Benlik Kurgusu, Kişisel Değerler ve Sürdürülebilir Tüketim: Hindistan ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nden Kültürlerarası Bulgular

Öz

Sürdürülebilir tüketim pazarlamada popüler bir araştırma konusu haline gelmiş olsa da, farklı kültürel ortamlardaki tezahürü pek fazla araştırma ilgisi görememiştir. Benlik kurgusu teorisine dayanan üç çalışma kapsamında, Hindistan ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde sürdürülebilir tüketim üzerinde bağımsız ve bağımlı benlik kurgularının oynadığı roller hakkında hipotezler geliştirilmiş ve test edilmiştir. Bağımsız benlik kurgusuna sahip tüketicilerin sürdürülebilir tüketim niyetlerinin, bağımlı benlik kurgusuna sahip tüketicilerin sürdürülebilir tüketim niyetlerinden, daha düşük olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca, benliğin ötesine geçme değerlerinin, benlik kurgusu ile sürdürülebilir tüketim ilişkisine aracılık ettiği ortaya konmuştur. Bulgular doğrultusunda, bu çalışmanın teorik ve uygulamacılara yönelik çıkarımları tartışılmış ve gelecek araştırma önerileri geliştirilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: bağımsız benlik kurgusu, bağımlı benlik kurgusu, benlik kurgusu, benliğin ötesine geçme, sürdürülebilir tüketim.

Introduction

Inspiring sustainable consumption has become an important strategic imperative for marketing firms and policy-making organizations. Simultaneously, consumers have become more demanding of firms to deliver sustainable products and services. This is because of the realization on the part of both firms and consumers that the exponential growth in the world's population parallel with the logarithmic limits to the world's resources will make sustaining human life nearly impossible in the decades ahead. Though the intersection of these trends paints an alarming picture at first glance, it also describes a landscape that has triggered promising opportunities for marketing managers and policy-makers. On the policy side, thought leaders have been encouraging consumers to conserve food,

water, and energy; adapt their lifestyles to become more eco-friendlier; and through their consumption experiences invest in a future world that is much more self-sustaining than it is today (The Economist, 2018). On the managerial front, marketing professionals have begun de-marketing actions, such as through advertising and eco-friendly product development, to engage consumers in the consumption of resource-preserving products and practices (DuFault, 2014). Marketing researchers, on their part, have accelerated their attention on sustainability issues by focusing their studies on such questions as attitudes toward sustainability and the resulting sustainable consumption behavior (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006); profiles of sustainable consumers (Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005); antecedents and consequences of sustainable consumption (Goh & Balaji, 2016; Tanner & Kast, 2003; Vlosky, Ozanne & Fontenot, 1999; Yadav & Pathak, 2016); and fostering sustainability across consumer groups (Prothero et al., 2011; Yadav, Balaji & Jebarajakirthy, 2019).

Yet, none of these studies have linked sustainable consumption to consumers' self-construals. Self-construals are important ingredients in defining consumers' selves, for instance in their self-categorizations, self-efficacies, self-perceptions, self-regulations, and expressions of their material, moral, and spiritual identities (Bagozzi, Romani, Grappi & Zarantonello, 2021); in these roles, they can be significant drivers of sustainable consumption behavior. Further, only a handful of the studies on sustainable consumption were conducted in the developing world (Child & Tsai, 2005; Khare, 2015; Nkamnebe, 2011; Vergragt, Akenji & Dewick, 2014; Yadav & Pathak, 2017), with most focused on sustainable consumption in the developed countries (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Young et al., 2010). With the dramatic rise in the importance of the emerging markets in international commerce, especially the ferocious consumption appetites of their emancipated middle classes, increased knowledge about consumption behaviors in the emerging world has become more imminent and compelling. Better understanding the cross-cultural similarities and differences in sustainable consumption patterns around the world and the psychological and

sociological root causes of sustainable consumption in different market development settings can help managers make more effective segmentation, targeting and positioning strategy decisions.

In this paper, we contribute to filling this void. We extend the extant literature on sustainable consumption by examining consumers' consumption behavior through the lenses of self-construal theory and by studying this behavior across two different economic and cultural contexts, the United States and India. Specifically, across three studies we test hypotheses that posit that (1) sustainable consumption is linked to the self-construal of the individual such that individuals with the more salient independent self-construal will tend to show lower degrees of sustainable consumption than individuals with the more salient interdependent self-construal, and (2) that the relationship between the self-construal and sustainable consumption will be mediated by personal value profiles, in our case, self-transcendence (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004; Shavitt, Lee & Johnson, 2018). We anchor our work in self-construal theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; 2010; Oyserman & Lee, 2008) and the rich literature on personal values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Schwartz, 2012). In our first two studies, featuring an experimental and a cross-sectional design, respectively, we examine how the self-construal is linked to sustainable consumption. In our third study, we explore the role that self-transcendence might play in mediating that relationship. Our work should help managers develop a deeper understanding of their consumers' self-construal based consumption behaviors, target appropriate groups more efficiently, and segment these with greater efficacy.

The remainder of our paper is organized as follows. We first describe the theory foundation of our work from which we extract our hypotheses. We then present the three studies we conducted to test those hypotheses. We describe our findings and discuss how they relate to the previous literature and their theoretical and managerial implications. We conclude with suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Background

Self-Construal Theory

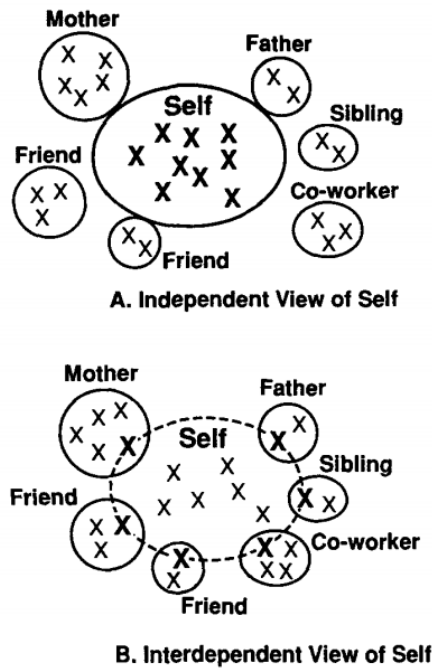
The important position that Identity has come to occupy in the psychology and social psychology literature can be traced to James' seminal work at the turn of the last century (1910) on the self and its material, social, and the spiritual self components. More recently, Baumeister (1999: 2) defined the self as the *individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what s/he is*. Consistent with this definition, we view the self as the person's accumulated sense of everything directly or indirectly linked with his identity and his life experiences guided and construed by that identity (Triandis & Gelfand, 2012); in essence, as how the individual construes his/her inner cognitive map of who s/he is (Bagozzi et al. 2021). In line with past research, we view the self as also comprised of multiple facets, such as the individual, relational, and the collective self-aspects, each associated with distinct social motivations and driving unique impacts on social behaviors (Triandis, 1995). This is because each of these is posited to generate separate cognitive organizations within the person's memory structure depending on its relative prominence in a given context, activating different behavioral pathways for the individual (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

In this context, the individual is said to draw a mental picture in which the "self" is positioned alongside "the other", i.e., other people, other groups, other institutions, and other identities with whom the individual interacts (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In this view, the *independent* self is construed when the individual evaluates herself/himself as an autonomous, independent person who is also egocentric and self-contained; it is the personal, private, or the idiocentric self, involving the conception of oneself as autonomous and unique and separated from others with clear boundaries.

This self-view is associated with a sense of independence from others and/or the social context. Thus, individuals possessing this self-construal are found more frequently in Western cultures; though this is a

universal tendency, one that is more prevalent, but not exclusively so, in the Western world (Triandis, 1995).

In contrast, the *interdependent* self is construed when the self is evaluated as a part of interpersonal relationships; people with the more prominent interdependent self-construal define their self-concept in the context of their relationships with others. That is, their selves are defined primarily by the social contexts in which they live their lives in more connected and less differentiated patterns from others. Persons with the interdependent self-construal are collective, allocentric, connected, and relational; they define their selves with collective affiliations, in-group norms, and roles and status defined by collectives (Triandis, 1995). This self-construal is more prevalent in non-Western cultures, such as in India and China (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012). These two manifestations of the self-construal are depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. The Independent and The Interdependent Self-Construal
(Markus & Kitayama, 1991).**

Self-Construals and Culture

Understanding the way people construe their selves has contributed to our knowledge of the nature of the self and how it is influenced by culture. For example, past research shows that Chinese consumers prefer brands in an assimilation frame, while their American counterparts prefer brands in a differentiation frame (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001); this finding underscoring that people from the Western cultures desire to be different from the other, while those from the non-Western cultures desire to be similar to others. Similarly, in self- vs. others'-serving motives, the independent self-construal is found to be positively associated with narcissism, a self-serving motive (Jonason et al., 2017), while the interdependent self-construal persons (Chinese participants) prefer sustainable options, an others-serving motive (Chuang, Xie & Liu, 2016). Furthermore, Utz (2004) finds that people primed with independence are concerned primarily with their own outcomes, whereas people primed with interdependence are concerned with the outcomes of their interactions with others. These findings underscore the behavioral consequences of culture and the self: the actions of independents are shaped by self-serving motives, whereas other-serving motives shape the actions of individuals with the interdependent self-construal.

Sustainable Consumption, Personal Values, and the Self-Construal

Sustainable consumption can be defined as the consumption of products and services in which natural resources and the Earth's eco-systems are protected from harm and future consumption activity for all human beings is assured. Thus, sustainable consumption is not limited to the present and irresponsible satisfaction of self-interest, but is future-consumption oriented and takes others' interests into consideration during current consumption (Trudel, 2019).

Values are 'the criteria people use to select and justify actions and to evaluate people, including the self, and events' (Schwartz, 2012: 1); they are normative concepts that address questions of right and wrong and

prescriptions for action (Bagozzi et al., 2021). They can be influential determinants in decision-making, in both individual and group settings, for instance in what the person is and what she desires to be or become, chart their volitional behavior, and construct her self-categorization (a cognitive awareness of one's membership in a social group) and social identity (self-awareness of one's membership in a group, plus the emotional and the evaluative significance of this membership, thus cognitive and affective commitment).

As abstract representations of desired end-states that serve as guiding principles in peoples' lives, values are transformed into concrete and material reality when embodied by products or in other human actions, such as consumption (Schwartz, 2012). They are at once shared (universal constructs that represent similar meanings around the world), but have been shown to vary systematically in their self-relevance for people in different cultural contexts (Torelli et al., 2012). Applications of Schwartz's Value Survey (the SVS), a universally reliable and cross-culturally-validated 11-dimension measure of values in human values research has shown that value priorities vary cross-culturally (Shavitt et al. 2018), especially in the pursuit of individualistic and collectivistic goals, in predicting the prevalence of different types of advertising appeals, and in understanding the determinants of purchase intentions (Aaker & Maheshwaran, 1997; Han & Shavitt, 1994).

As one of Schwartz's 11 conceptually-distinct human value domains comprising a motivational continuum and one of four higher-order value types, Self-transcendence refers to *how well people identify themselves as an integral part of the universe as a whole and their experiences as elevated (to levels) that go beyond themselves* (Garcia et al., 2017; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). As one of four higher-order values, it is comprised of three value dimensions, each linked to sustainable consumption: social concerns (understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people); concerns with nature (protection of the environment); and benevolence (preservation and enhancement of the welfare of all the people the person interacts with). As it is associated with indi-

vidual value items such as unity with nature, environmental protection, social justice, equality, wisdom, helpfulness, loyalty, and responsibility (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004), self-transcendence should influence sustainable consumption positively (White & Peloza, 2009).

Extant research underscores this prediction in other contexts, as well. For example, previous studies have linked such constructs as environmental consciousness (Vlosky et al., 1999), altruistic and egoistic values (Yadav, 2016), personal values (Thøgersen & Ölander, 2002), and environmental concerns (Yadav & Pathak, 2016), and norms (Yadav et al., 2019) to sustainable consumption. Anchored in the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980), the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the theory of basic human values (Schwartz, 2012), these studies shed light on the cognitive processes that lead the consumer to action in sustainable consumption contexts. Anchored in Self-construal Theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), in contrast however, our work goes a step further by examining the link between the integrated cognitive and motivational constructions of the self (self-construals) and sustainable consumption, and does so in two different cultural contexts, the US and India. Specifically, it examines the role of the self-construal in linking normative to culture-specific patterns of behavior. This integrated focus should extend current knowledge about, and managerial practice in, consumer behavior in sustainable consumption contexts.

Self-Construals and Consumer Values

Self-construal theory (SCT) offers another theory lens through which sustainable consumption can be viewed. SCT posits that people in different cultures have and construct different construals of their selves (the independent self) and of others (the interdependent self), and these self-constructions determine the nature of their individual and social experiences, including their cognition, emotions, and motivation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For instance, these constructions help frame their fundamental notions of, and behaviors toward, relatedness to others (attending to others' needs, harmonious interdependence with them or inde-

pendence from others, attending to the self by discovering and expressing their unique inner attributes, their norms about self-evaluation and judgments, their cognitive organizations, and expectations of self-regulation and self-actualization (belonging, understanding, trusting, controlling, and self-enhancing (Triandis, 1995).

Sustainable consumption requires thinking beyond one's self-interest into self-transcendence, or thinking of the other and what will benefit the other, even in the far distant future (Trudel, 2019; White & Simpson 2013; Zaval et al. 2015). Consistent with this view, the highly self-transcendent consumer is likely to construe her self-concept in which others have a substantial role in the representation of that self, and thus will likely engage in sustainable consumption (Markus, 2017). In contrast, the consumer who is low on self-transcendence is less likely to engage in sustainable consumption since his self-construal is defined by autonomous, independent, and egocentric values (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009). It is probably safe to argue that self-transcendence is a value that is more likely to be possessed and displayed by the interdependent self-construal consumers than with the independent self-construal consumers. The interdependent self-construal consumers should engage in sustainable consumption to self-actualize by maintaining harmony with their close others and thereby exhibiting social-identity enhancing behaviors (Hong & Chang, 2015). The independent self-construal should hinder sustainable consumption due to its egocentric nature and its pursuit of self-interest, a behavior that is orthogonal to self-transcendence. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1: Individuals with a more salient interdependent self-construal will be more likely to engage in sustainable consumption when compared to their independent self-construal counterparts.

H2: Interdependent self-construal individuals will possess higher levels of self-transcendence, such that this heightened self-transcendence value will lead them to consume in a more sustainable manner.

We test these hypotheses in three studies described below. Specifically, we examine whether there is a link between a consumer's self-con-

strual (independent vs interdependent) and her tendency for sustainable consumption, and in that context, whether the independent self-construal is negatively linked to sustainable consumption. We also examine if this relationship is mediated by self-transcendence values. We operationalize the self-construal through widely accepted and validated manipulations (Study 1 and Study 3) and a widely accepted psychometrically sound scale (Study 2). We operationalize sustainable consumption tendency via participants' responses to a psychometrically sound scale (Study 1 and Study 2) and participants' purchase intentions of an eco-friendly product (Study 2). We operationalize self-transcendence through participants' responses to a psychometrically sound scale (Study 3). We test H1 through Studies 1 and 2 and H2 through Study 3.

Methodology

Study 1

In Study 1, we test the link between the self-construal and sustainable consumption tendency using a between-subjects experimental design. Previous studies on the self-construal (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gardner, Gabriel & Lee, 1999; Hong & Chang, 2015; Zhang & Shrum, 2009) manipulated this construct through having participants read two versions of a paragraph that differed only with respect to whether the pronouns were independent (e.g., I, mine) or interdependent (e.g., we, ours). We adopt the same priming technique in our work.

Participants, procedure and measures

We recruited 600 adults United States residents (46.4% female, age range 17–68, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.67$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.79$) through MTurk, restricted to participants with an MTurk approval rating of 95% or greater. After excluding 24 participants from this recruitment set because they failed our attention check question, our analysis sample reduced to 576 participants (288 for each condition).

The participants first read the informed consent form, and signed it

for affirmation before moving forward. We then randomly assigned the participants to the two conditions we were studying (independent, interdependent). In the independent self-construal condition, participants provided their responses to a battery of items after reading a descriptive paragraph (a story about a trip to a city) that contained 19 pronouns with all of the pronouns referring to I, my, me or myself. In the interdependent self-construal condition, participants provided their responses to the battery of items after reading the same descriptive paragraph that contained 19 pronouns with all of the pronouns referring to we, our, us or ourselves. This priming manipulation has been used frequently to manipulate the self-construal in past studies (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Choi et al., 2016; Oyserman & Lee, 2008).

Following the priming manipulation, all participants responded to the 24-item Self-Construal scale developed by Singelis (1994) and commonly used in previous research (Hardin, Leong & Bhagwat, 2004). We then asked the participants to answer the question: “What was the content of the paragraph that you read?” to assure that our priming was successful, and asked them to respond to the 5-item Sustainable Consumption scale developed by Manchiraju et al. (2016). Lastly, before being thanked and getting paid, participants reported demographic information.

We operationalized the Independent and the Interdependent self-construals using Singelis’s 24-item Self-Construal scale (1994), composed of the a 12-item independent self subscale (e.g., *I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards, I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects*) and a 12-item interdependent self subscale (e.g., *It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group, My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me*). Participants reported their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). This measure ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.29$) demonstrated adequate reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of 0.81 for the independent self-construal ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.42$) and 0.85 for the interdependent self-construal ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.17$) subscales, respectively.

Sustainable consumption was operationalized through the 5-item Sustainable Consumption scale (Manchiraju et al., 2016). Sample items include: “*I pay premium for products (e.g., apparel) that were manufactured in an environmentally friendly way*” and “*I buy eco-friendly apparel even if I have to forgo some clothing options.*” Participants reported their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). This unidimensional scale (M = 4.79, SD = 1.41) demonstrated satisfactory reliability (α = .87).

Table 1: Observed Correlations Between Variables in Study 1

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|--------|-------|
| 1. Age | - | | | | | |
| 2. Income | .06 | - | | | | |
| 3. Gender | -.02 | .03 | - | | | |
| 4. Education | -.04 | .10* | .01 | - | | |
| 5. Independent self | .05 | .11* | .07 | .13* | - | |
| 6. Interdependent self | .08 | .05 | -.04 | .02 | -.26** | |
| 7. Sustainable consumption tendency | .06 | .05 | .09 | .17** | -.31** | .19** |

Note: N = 576. * p < .05. ** p < .01.

Findings

The correlation matrix is presented in Table 1. To perform the manipulation check of self-construal priming, we performed independent sample t-tests. Participants who were assigned to the independent self-construal condition (M = 6.13, SD = 1.48) reported possessing significantly higher levels of the independent self-construal than their interdependent condition counterparts (M = 5.09, SD = 1.36), $t(574) = 4.13, p < .01$. Similarly, participants who were assigned to the interdependent self-construal condition (M = 4.50, SD = 1.34) reported significantly greater levels of the interdependent self-construal condition than those participants who were assigned to the independent self-construal condition (M =

2.52, $SD = 1.05$), $t(574) = 4.94$, $p < .01$. These tests indicated that our priming had been properly worked.

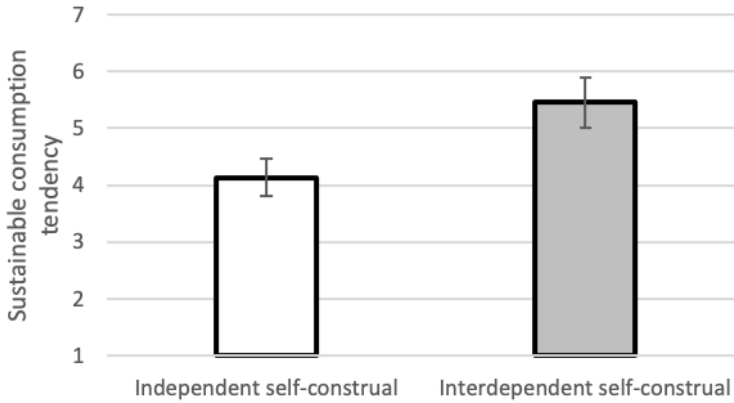


Figure 2. Sustainable Consumption Tendency by Self-Construal (Study 1)

We conducted a second sample t-test to test our hypothesis. Compared to the participants who were assigned to the interdependent self-construal condition ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.51$), participants who were assigned to the independent self-construal condition ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.30$) reported a lower level of sustainable consumption tendency, $t(574) = 3.29$, $p < .01$. These findings support our H1 (see Figure 2).

Discussion

It is noteworthy that the participants primed to (temporarily) possess an independent self-construal showed a lower degree of sustainable consumption tendency than those participants who were primed to have an interdependent self-construal. The experimental design in which the self-construal was manipulated allowed us to rule out alternative explanations of the relationship between the self-construal and sustainable consumption tendency.

To provide convergent evidence to our findings on H1 from our Study 1, we tested that hypothesis with cross-sectional data collected

from an individualistic (the United States) and a collectivistic culture (India) in Study 2.

Study 2

In Study 2, we tested H1 in two different cultural settings, one in which individuals have shown independence tendencies (the United States) and the other where citizens have shown interdependence tendencies (India) in line with Lalwani & Shavitt (2013) and Shavitt, Lee & Johnson (2018). Previous research has shown these two contexts to be individualistic and collectivistic, respectively (Triandis, 1995), traits that are typically associated with, but are separate from, the independent and the interdependent self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Participants, procedure and measures

We recruited 800 adults (48.4% female, age range 18–68, $M_{\text{age}} = 38.26$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.03$) through MTurk, restricted to individuals with an MTurk approval rating of 95% or greater who were residents of India ($n = 400$) or residents of the United States ($n = 400$). We collected the data from Indian and U.S. adults separately through two different MTurk human intelligence tasks (HITs).

We excluded from analysis data from 78 participants¹, 32 from the US sample and 46 from the Indian sample, due to their failure to respond correctly to our attention check question. This left a total of 722 participants, 368 U.S. adults and 354 Indian adults, aged 18 to 68 years (354 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 39.69$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.97$) for our final statistical analysis.

Prior to beginning the survey, the participants read the informed consent form and were requested to sign this form to move forward. All participants gave their consent to be a part of our study. Following the in-

¹ Reanalysis of the whole data demonstrated that the significance of the findings were not contingent on the exclusion of the careless participants.

formed consent page, participants were able to access our questionnaire in which a battery of demographic items and measures of self-construal and sustainable consumption tendency were presented. After questionnaire completion, participants were thanked and paid. We operationalized the self-construal by using the 24-items Self-Construal scale (Singelis, 1994). This scale assesses the independent and the interdependent self-construal with two twelve-items subscales. Participants reported their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). Reported responses ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.22$) demonstrated adequate reliability for both the independent ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.39$, $\alpha = .82$) and the interdependent self ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.21$, $\alpha = .87$) subscales. Moreover, these subscales showed relatively high levels of reliability for both the Indian ($\alpha_{\text{independent}} = .80$, $\alpha_{\text{interdependent}} = .84$) and the U.S. samples ($\alpha_{\text{independent}} = .84$, $\alpha_{\text{interdependent}} = .89$), respectively.

Sustainable consumption was operationalized through the 5-item Sustainable Consumption scale (Manchiraju et al., 2016). Sample items include: “*I pay premium for products (e.g., apparel) that were manufactured in an environmentally friendly way*” and “*I buy eco-friendly apparel even if I have to forgo some clothing options.*” Participants reported their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). Responses to this scale ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.40$) also demonstrated satisfactory reliability scores ($\alpha_{\text{total}} = .89$, $\alpha_{\text{India}} = .87$, $\alpha_{\text{U.S.}} = .90$).

Table 2. Observed Correlations Between Variables in Study 2

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|--------|-------|
| 1. Age | - | | | | | |
| 2. Income | .08 | - | | | | |
| 3. Gender | -.03 | .02 | - | | | |
| 4. Education | -.01 | .07 | .01 | - | | |
| 5. Independent self | .04 | .10* | -.03 | .12* | - | |
| 6. Interdependent self | .06 | -.05 | .08 | -.06 | -.24** | - |
| 7. Sustainable consumption tendency | .05 | .04 | .07 | .15** | -.41** | .34** |

Note: $N = 722$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Findings

The correlation matrix for this study is presented in Table 2. We conducted t-tests on the mean values obtained from the American and the Indian samples to statistically confirm that these samples were different in their self-construals. We found that participants in the Indian sample reported a greater degree of interdependence in their self-construals ($M_{\text{Indian}} = 5.21$, $SD_{\text{Indian}} = 1.44$) than their U.S. counterparts ($M_{\text{U.S.}} = 3.25$, $SD_{\text{U.S.}} = 1.26$), $t(720) = 4.93$, $p < .01$, and the U.S. participants reported a greater level of independence in their self-construals ($M_{\text{U.S.}} = 6.37$, $SD_{\text{U.S.}} = 1.46$) than their Indian counterparts ($M_{\text{Indian}} = 4.45$, $SD_{\text{Indian}} = 1.32$), $t(720) = 4.98$, $p < .01$.

To provide further convergent evidence on H1, we conducted a Pearson correlation test. Our results from this test revealed a significant negative association between the independent self and sustainable consumption tendency, $r(720) = -.41$, $p < .01$, which supports H1. We also found a positive significant relationship between the interdependent self-construal and sustainable consumption tendency, $r(720) = .34$, $p < .01$, further supporting H1.

In light of Pinto et al.’s (2011) findings on the relationship between the self-construal and sustainable consumption, we performed a partial correlation analysis holding education level constant to rule out other,

alternative explanations to the relationship between the self-construal and sustainable consumption tendencies. Both the negative association between the independent self and sustainable consumption tendency ($r(720) = -.31, p < .01$) and the positive association between the interdependent self and sustainable consumption tendency ($r(720) = .22, p < .05$) remained significant.

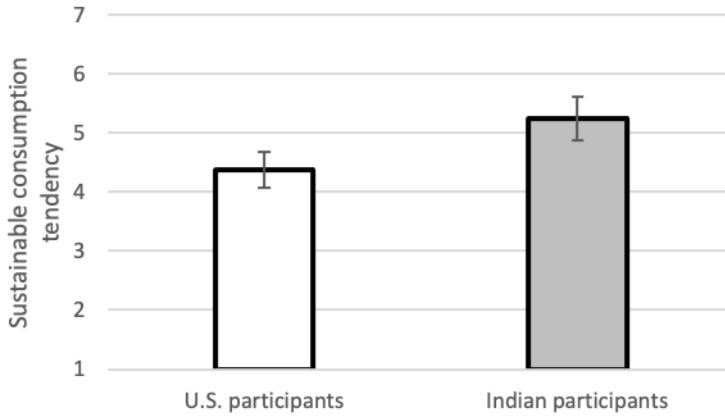


Figure 3. Sustainable Consumption Tendency by Culture (Study 2)

We also compared the sustainable consumption tendencies of the American ($M = 4.98, SD = 1.42$) and the Indian participants ($M = 4.72, SD = 1.37$) to provide further support for H1. We found no significant difference between the American and the Indian sample participants ($t(720) = 1.75, p > .05$), but this non-significance became significant, $F(1, 719) = 5.62, p < .05$, when we kept the education level constant. The adjusted means showed that the American participants ($M = 4.37, SD = 1.38$) had lower degrees of sustainable consumption tendencies than their Indian counterparts ($M = 5.25, SD = 1.39$), providing further support for H1 (see Figure 3).

Discussion

Based on the analysis we conducted on cross-sectional survey data collected from American and Indian consumers, our findings in Study

2 underscored our findings from Study 1: it demonstrated that the independent self-construal possessing individuals will display lower degrees of sustainable consumption tendencies when compared to their interdependent self-construal possessing counterparts. This conclusion, however, was reversed when we controlled for the level of education. That is, when we did not control for the level of education in a cultural setting, the sustainable consumption tendency of US consumers was higher than their Indian counterparts, but this difference was non-significant. In contrast, when we did control for the level of education, the sustainable consumption tendencies of Indian consumers were higher than their American counterparts, and this was significantly so. This result underscores the importance of the level of education in consumers' sustainable consumption tendencies in a cross-cultural context. We reached this conclusion based on data collected in two different cultural settings, providing external validity evidence to our findings in Study 1.

Study 3

We examined the relationship between the self-construal and sustainable consumption tendency in a deeper manner in Study 3. Specifically, we aimed to understand whether and the extent to which self-transcendence, a personal value in the SVS (Schwartz, 2012), might mediate that relationship, lowering the independent self-construal's sustainable consumption tendencies, as we hypothesized in H2. We conducted a between-subjects experiment to unveil whether and how this mechanism might function.

Participants, procedure and measures

Through M-Turk, we recruited 124 American participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.10$, $SD = 9.79$, 69 females, 51 males). They received a fee for participating in the experiment. We randomly assigned each participant into one of two conditions: the independent self-construal ($n = 62$) and the interdependent self-construal ($n = 62$).

First, participants completed a previously-used priming task (Zhang

& Shrum, 2009) to activate an independent or an interdependent self-construal. In this priming procedure, participants in the randomly-assigned independent self construal condition wrote down their thoughts after being told “Remember, enjoying your life is what it is really all about”. Participants in the randomly-assigned interdependent self construal condition wrote down their thoughts after being told “Remember, enjoying relationships with your family or friends is what life is really all about”.

After this priming procedure, participants responded to the Singelis (1994) 24-items Self-construal scale. The responses that the participants gave to the scale’s two sub-scales demonstrated adequate reliabilities for the independent and the interdependent self-construal sub-scales ($M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.33$, $\alpha = .85$; $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = .81$, respectively), indicating that our priming manipulation had been successful.

Participants were then asked to respond to statements about self-transcendence, a value system domain in the Schwartz Value System (SVS), composed of two dimensions, ie, universalism (e.g., unity with nature, broad-mindedness, protecting the environment, a world at peace) and benevolence (e.g., responsible, meaning in life, honest, helpful) (Schwartz, 2012) using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not important at all, 7 = of supreme importance). In operationalizing self-transcendence, we summed the values for universalism ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = .73$) and benevolence ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.21$, $\alpha = .78$) to arrive at a composite index value ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.22$).

We then showed the participants a sustainable product description: an ‘EcoTire’ we adopted from Reczek, Trudel & White (2018). In this description, we informed the participants that the product was made with sustainable methods and materials, such as usage of “green” renewable electrical energy (see, Appendix A). We asked the participants to respond to the following question: “Assuming you were looking for new tires, to what extent would you be willing to purchase *this* car tire?” Participants reported their responses to this question ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.22$) using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (“not at all likely”) to 7 (“very likely”). They also reported their demographic information as they did in Studies 1 and 2.

Table 3. Observed Correlations Between Variables in Study 3.

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1. Age | - | | | | | | |
| 2. Income | .09 | - | | | | | |
| 3. Gender | -.03 | .03 | - | | | | |
| 4. Education | -.04 | .06 | .04 | - | | | |
| 5. Independent self | .07 | .11* | -.02 | .14* | - | | |
| 6. Interdependent self | .08 | -.03 | .09 | -.07 | -.27** | - | |
| 7. Self-transcendence | .11* | .08 | -.07 | .05 | -.41** | .33** | - |
| 8. Willing to purchase eco product | .04 | .05 | .08 | .17** | -.19** | .35** | .49** |

Note: $N = 124$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Findings

Independent sample t-test results demonstrated that the self-construal priming task was successful (see correlation matrix, Table 3). Specifically, participants primed with the independent self-construal reported a more salient independent self ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.37$) than participants primed with the interdependent self-construal ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.29$), $t(122) = 4.14$, $p < .001$. Similarly, participants primed with the interdependent self-construal reported a more salient interdependent self ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.27$) than participants primed with the independent self-construal ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.19$), $t(122) = 3.52$, $p < .01$.

To test H2, we conducted another independent samples t-test in which purchase willingness was compared across the two self-construal conditions. The results showed that participants primed with the independent self-construal ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.19$) possessed lower willingness to purchase the sustainable car tire than did the participants primed with the interdependent self-construal ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 1.26$), $t(122) = 3.91$, $p < .01$. This finding supported H2 (see Figure 4).

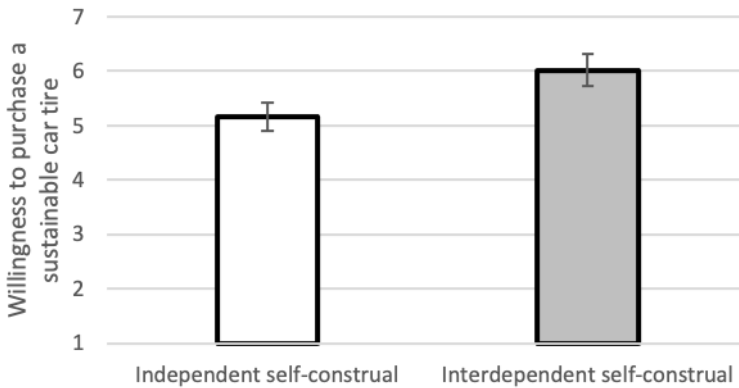


Figure 4. Willingness to Purchase the Eco-tTre by the Two Self-Construals (Study 3)

We then tested the mediator role of self-transcendence on the link between the self-construal (0 = interdependent self, 1 = independent self) and willingness to purchase a sustainable car tire using the SPSS PROCESS macro program for mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013). We tested the significance of the indirect effect by estimating a bias-corrected 95% CI with 10,000 bootstrapping samples (Preacher et al., 2007). The 95% CI of the indirect effect of self-transcendence ($b = -.21$, $SE = .12$) did *not* contain zero $[-0.38, -0.03]$, confirming that self-transcendence *does* mediate the relationship between the self-construal and willingness to purchase a sustainable consumption product, supporting H2.

Discussion

The findings of Study 3 showed that participants with a salient interdependent self-construal will be more likely to exhibit greater tendency to engage in sustainable consumption when compared to the participants with a salient independent self-construal, garnering support for H1. These findings also provided support for H2 in that they showed self-transcendence values to mediate the relationship between the self-construal and sustainable consumption tendencies. Specifically, they showed that, self-transcendence values, low in the independent self-construal indi-

viduals, will help decrease sustainable consumption tendencies of these individuals. These findings are useful in that they help replicate our findings in Studies 1 and 2, but with new operationalizations of the self-construal and sustainable consumption constructs.

General Discussion

In this study, we demonstrate that individuals with more salient independent self-construals will display lower tendencies for sustainable consumption than do individuals with the more salient interdependent self-construal (Study 1, Study 2). We also show in a third study that personal values, such as self-transcendence, can mediate the relationship between the self-construal and sustainable consumption tendencies. To provide convergent findings on our hypotheses, we manipulated the self-construal of the participants through a between-subject experimental design in Study 1. We then provided external validity evidence in Study 2 by analyzing cross-sectional survey data collected from two different cultural settings, India and the United States. Finally, we explored the functioning of the link between the self-construal and sustainable consumption tendencies by mediating that link with self-transcendence, a personal value.

Theoretical Contributions

Our study extends the stream of research on the empirical and theoretical antecedents of sustainable consumption by introducing a cross-cultural perspective on it anchored in self-construal theory, a new perspective on sustainable consumption. Previous studies (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Young et al., 2010) were conducted on developed country data. Though we do have some recent studies focusing on developing country settings (Child & Tsai, 2005; Nkamnebe, 2011; Khare, 2015; Vergragt et al., 2014; Yadav & Pathak, 2016; 2017), our study is unique in that it offers a cross-cultural comparison between American and Indian consumer samples and tests the possible mediation effect of self-transcendence, a personal value construct from the value

systems literature (Schwartz, 2012). Thus, our paper should shed deeper light on the cross-cultural nature of sustainable consumption and how it is linked to consumers' self-construals.

Extant research pioneered by Markus & Kitayama (1991) posited that individuals with more salient interdependent selves will exhibit collective, allocentric, connected, and relational dispositions in their behavior, emphasizing "the other" when they define themselves. In contrast, those with a more salient independent self will display individualistic, egocentric, and self-centered dispositions in their behavior, underlining the "self" in their self definitions. Recent studies have underscored these views by providing evidence that self-serving motives and self-enhancement values shape most actions of independent-self individuals, whereas others-serving motives and self-transcendence values primarily shape most actions of individuals with the interdependent self-construal (Chung et al., 2016; Jonason et al., 2017; Utz, 2004). Given that sustainable consumption requires self-transcendence (Trudel, 2019; White & Peloza, 2009), which includes relinquishing self-interest for the sake of others' interests, it would be reasonable to posit that an independent self-construal might prevent individuals from exhibiting sustainable consumption behavior due to the lower levels of self-transcendence possessed by these persons. We underlined this conclusion in our research by empirically demonstrating that the independent self-construal will hamper sustainable consumption tendencies, mediated by lower levels of self-transcendence. Thus, we extend the previous finding by Trudel (2019) and White & Peloza (2009) by indicating that self-transcendence will accelerate sustainable consumption; highly self-transcendent individuals are more likely to engage in sustainable consumption behavior.

Managerial Implications

Our study also has implications for managers and public policy makers. On the managerial front, our findings suggest that marketing managers can design and implement marketing programs by learning more

about their target market's self-construal profiles and target their segmentation and positioning approaches by taking personal values, such as self-transcendence, into consideration. Managers can also initiate imaginative conservation programs, such as Coca Cola's water-saving uses project in the African countries, to encourage sustainable consumption, not only in the developing but also in the developed world. Public policy makers, especially those in the NGOs, can design programs that will be congruent with the interdependent self-construal and encourage sustainable consumption, for example in the emerging economies like India and China. They can also encourage individuals in those countries to become more self-reliant (independent) while including the other and future generations in their social worlds (interdependent) while conservation-oriented consuming.

Limitations and Future Directions

Three limitations of our work offer opportunities for future research. First, we operationalized sustainable consumption tendency through participants' responses to scale items and willingness to purchase a sustainable consumption product, a car tire. Future research should measure sustainable consumption behavior of consumers across many other, often unusually-consumed, products and services and in real-world settings with on-site observations. Future studies should also examine the influence of the independent vs the interdependent self-construals on sustainable consumption within countries and across multiple country settings to help provide external validity to our findings.

Second, we examined the mediating effect of self-enhancement, a personal value, on the relationships between the self-construal and sustainable consumption behavior. Future research should explore the possible effects of many other mediating and moderating variables on this behavior, for instance, the effects of other SVS values, i.e., self-enhancement or consumer dispositions or environmentalism (Dogan & Ozmen, 2019). Future research should also examine if the self-construal effects on sustainable consumption may be affected by the nature of the product


being considered, ie, a hedonic vs a utilitarian product purchase, and whether these effects are different in service encounter settings, ie, in vacation package or children's education purchases.

Third, future studies might operationalize their mediators in ways that are different than ours. We operationalized self-transcendence by participants' responses to scale items rather than manipulating it, but other approaches, such as causal-chain-process designs (Spencer, Zanna & Fong, 2005) may yield different conclusions. This may be accomplished, for instance through conducting three between-subject experiments in which the effect of the self-construal on self-transcendence, the effect of self-transcendence on sustainable consumption, and the effect of self-construal on sustainable consumption are investigated, respectively.

Conclusion

Taken together, our findings illustrate that the self-construal can be an important indicator of sustainable consumption behavior, ie, individuals with the more salient independent self-construal will exhibit lower levels of sustainable consumption tendencies when compared to their more salient interdependent self-construal counterparts. We also illustrate that the relationship between the self-construal and consumption behavior may be mediated by self-transcendence, a personal value. We show that the lower degrees of self-transcendence found in the independent self-construal individuals will diminish their sustainable consumption tendencies. Our work is significant because it extends the growing body of research on sustainable consumption and its antecedents, processes, and outcomes through a new theoretical lens, self-construal theory.

Appendix A. The Sustainable Product Description of an ‘EcoTire’ -Adapted from Reczek et al. (2018)



ERPA
Enviornmental Products
Rating Agency

**Tires that are best for the road and best
for the Environment**

The carbon footprint for these tires is 24 kg which is half that of most tires. This is the total carbon dioxide (CO2) and other greenhouse gases emitted from the raw materials, production, and distribution of these tires. By using green renewable electricity in the production of the tires we have reduced the carbon footprint by 4 kg per tire.

You can reduce your own carbon footprint by using ethanol based fuels in your automobile and by driving the speed limit. Ultimately, everyone would drive hybrid or electric vehicles.

By committing to reduce our carbon footprint, we are doing our part in trying to find a solution to global warming.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This research was carried out in accordance with the rules of scientific research and publication ethics.

Authors’ Contribution Rates to the Article

The authors contributed equally to the study.

Statement of Interest

This research is not subject to any conflict of interest.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Benlik Kurgusu, Kişisel Değerler ve Sürdürülebilir Tüketim: Hindistan ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nden Kültürlerarası Bulgular

Bu çalışmada, tüketicilerin tüketim davranışları benlik kurgusu teorisi perspektifinden iki farklı ekonomik ve kültürel bağlamda (Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Hindistan) incelenerek sürdürülebilir tüketim literatürüne katkı sağlanması amaçlanmaktadır. Üç çalışma neticesinde; (1) sürdürülebilir tüketimin bireyin benlik kurgusu ile bağlantılı olduğu, böylece bağımsız benlik kurgusuna sahip bireylerin (bağımlı benlik kurgusuna sahip bireylere kıyasla) daha düşük düzeyde sürdürülebilir tüketim gösterme eğilimine sahip olduğu ve (2) benlik kurgusu ile sürdürülebilir tüketim arasındaki ilişkide kişisel değer profillerinin aracı role sahip olduğu hipotezlerimiz ile test edilmiştir.

DeneySEL ve kesitsel anket çalışmalardan oluşan üç çalışmada, benlik kurgusu teorisi arka planına sahip şekilde Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Hindistan kültürleri kapsamında sürdürülebilir tüketim üzerinde bağımsız ve bağımlı benlik kurgularının oynadığı rollere dair hipotezler geliştirmiş ve test edilmiştir.

Bağımsız benlik kurgusuna sahip tüketicilerin sürdürülebilir tüketim niyetlerinin, bağımlı benlik kurgusuna sahip tüketicilere kıyasla, daha düşük olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca, benliğin ötesine geçme değerlerinin, benlik kurgusu ile sürdürülebilir tüketim ilişkisine aracılık ettiği ortaya konulmuştur.

Bu çalışma, sürdürülebilir tüketim üzerine yeni bir teori olan benlik kurgusu teorisine dayalı kültürlerarası bir bakış açısı sunarak sürdürülebilir tüketimin ampirik ve teorik öncülleri üzerine literatürü genişletiyor. İlgili literatürdeki geçmiş çalışmalar, gelişmiş ülke verileri üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Gelişmekte olan ülke bağlamlarına odaklanan bazı yeni çalışmalar olmasına rağmen, bu çalışma Amerikan ve Hint tüketici bağlamları arasında kültürlerarası bir karşılaştırma sunması ve değer sistemleri literatüründen kişisel bir değer yapısı olan benliğin ötesine geçmenin olası aracılık etkisini test etmesi bakımından literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, sürdürülebilir tüketimin kültürlerarası doğası ve tüketicilerin benlik kurguları ile nasıl bağlantılı olduğuna dair ışık tutmaktadır.