



COLLABORATING CENTRE ON SUSTAINABLE
CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Sustainable consumer behaviour

Trends, challenges and opportunities to support the transition

Mariana Nicolau

14 June 2023

www.cscp.org



Welcome!

Are you ready to see your work from a new perspective?



© Nina Koepfer at Unsplash

What you will get out of this session

My promise

- Understand why consumer behaviour is crucial for sustainability
- Develop a more realistic view on people and learn how to gather useful insights about consumers
- Understand the key principles of behaviour change applied to your work



Help you increase the effectiveness of your consumer initiatives, ultimately increase your sustainable engagement level!

Introduction to the CSCP



Who we are



Founded in 2005

by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and Wuppertal Institute of Climate, Environment and Energy. Headquarters in Wuppertal, Germany



Think & Do Tank

The Centre provides scientific support to clients from the private and the public sector, in the field of sustainable consumption and production (SCP)

60 Team Members

with interdisciplinary backgrounds



International Scope

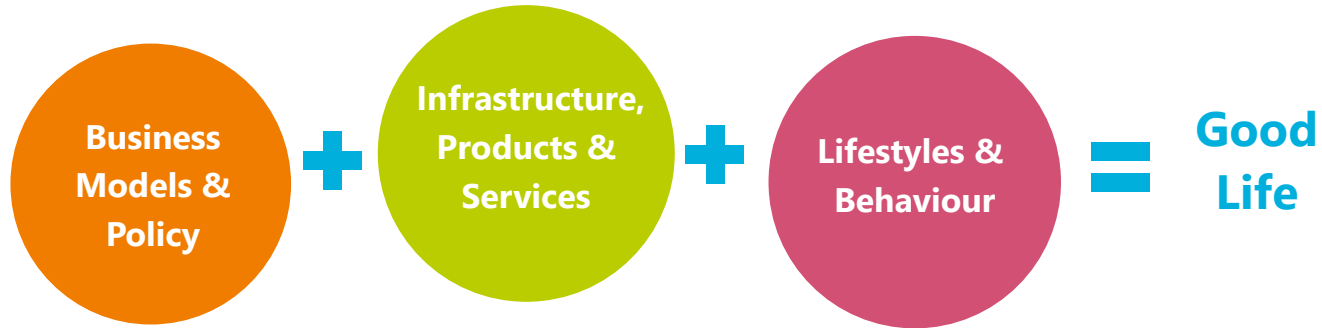
and activities in four continents



all photos © CSCP

The CSCP

Our Topics



Who we work with

Broad range of partners locally and globally

The image displays a grid of logos for various partners, organized into three horizontal sections:

- Regional & International:** This section contains the largest number of logos, including the European Union, World Economic Forum, IISD, ESCP, BMI, European Environment Agency, Greenpeace, KUONI GROUP, University Politecnica de Catalunya, KRI, WWF, MIGRAFICA, akatu, REWE, STIFTUNG MERCATOR, SOMO, 3CGF, CPI, USC, CLARIANT, CIU, IHT, switchasia, IIG, ECN, UNOPS, SITRA, UNWTO, wrap, iiiee, forum for the future, CCI PARIS ILE-DE-FRANCE, BURBERRY, Greenovate!, METRO, ZUYD, vito, NTNU, switchafrica, L-Università ta' Malta, and many others.
- National:** This section features logos for German and international organizations such as Deutsche Telekom, Nestlé, Die Verbraucher Initiative, triple innova, DER PARITÄTISCHE UNTERSPRECHENDE, ichó, ESF, FAIR FRIENDS, GFA, FHP, GDA, ihobe, DANONE, VORWERK, toom, giz, UmweltDialog, pro:radis, DBU, Henkel, TAB, BAND, ENTRANCE, VDW, zdf, Interface, dank, and envirus.
- Local:** This section lists logos for regional partners in the Wuppertal area, including Wuppertal Institut, RheinEnergie, UTOPIASTADT, UNIVERSITÄT SIEGEN, real, digitalhub, WSW, ideagolwerk, sivo, EFA+, CREATIVE.NRW, 20+ EFRE.NRW, COLABORA, Folklung, hhu, BOB KULTURWERK, Eine Welt Netz, ecosign, and others.

Why behaviour change?



What are our key sustainability challenges?



People are already changing their behaviours

And want to do the right thing



Photo by Social.Cut, Unsplash

Market insights on European plant-based sales show that, across 13 European countries, sales of plant-based foods grew by 21% between 2020 and 2022

<https://gfieurope.org/market-insights-on-european-plant-based-sales-2020-2022/>

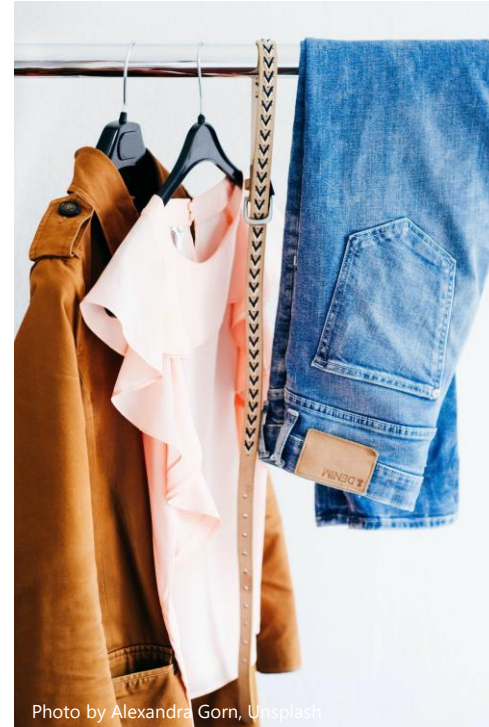


Photo by Alexandra Gorn, Unsplash

In Luxembourg, 63% of people have bought second-hand clothes

<https://www.luxtimes.lu/expat-hub/livinginluxembourg/lifestylechoices/sustainable-luxembourg/1335093.html>

Awareness does not always lead to behaviour change

The Intention-Action Gap



In reality: Food is the number one driver of negative sustainability impacts generated by household consumption in the EU today, of which animal-based products, such as meat, dairy and eggs, account for more than 50% of most of these impacts

Eurobarometer (2020); BEUC (2020), JRC (2019)



40-70%

of all global greenhouse gas emissions could be saved by 2050 through demand-side interventions

Reference: New IPCC report, Chapter 5 on people and behaviours:

https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg3/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_FinalDraft_Chapter05.pdf

We acknowledge that these are challenging times

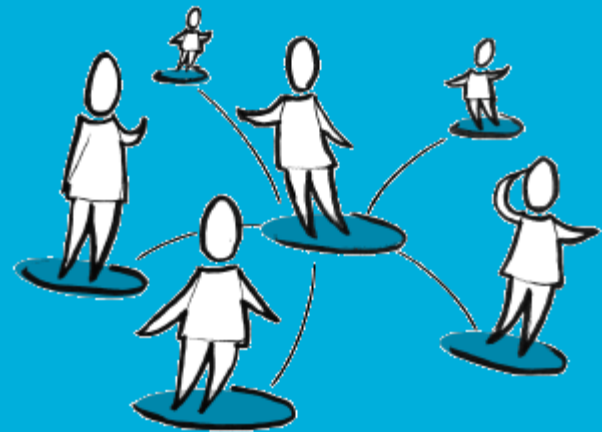


The best time to act and support consumers...

- ... might have been 3, 5 or 10 years ago.
- The second best time is **NOW!**



Understanding human behaviour



Which of these do you do?

Select the answer that applies most

- A** Paying for gym membership but not going
- B** Eating sugary snacks
- C** Hitting the snooze on my alarm
- D** Texting while driving
- E** None of these, I'm completely rational

Congratulations! You are human!

A behaviour change approach starts with thinking about why people do the things they do

Why do we do things all the time that we know aren't right, logical, sensible, helpful, healthy?



Humans are irrational



Photo by [Atoms](#) on [Unsplash](#)

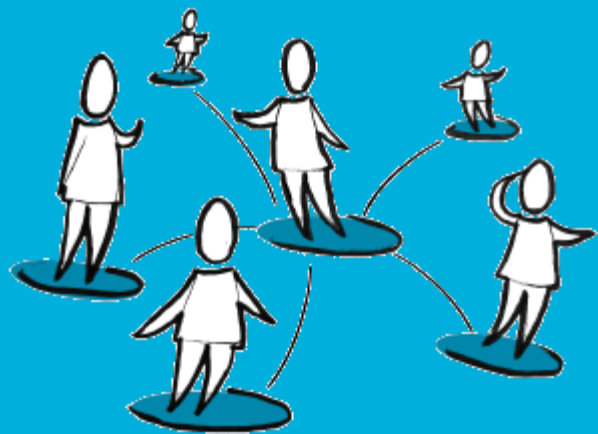


Photo by [Ilse Ornel](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Photo by [XAVIER PHOTOGRAPHY](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Why is it so?



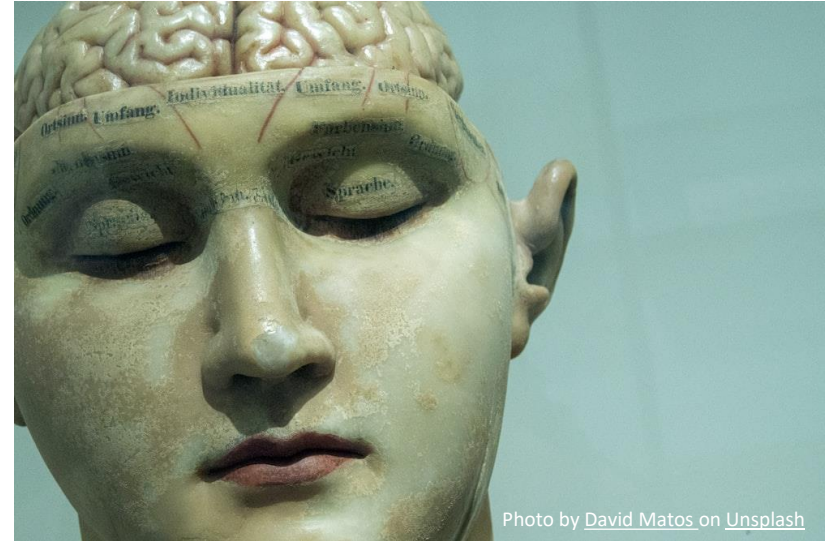
We're capable of two different types of thinking

But system 1 dominates our decision making

	System 1	System 2	
Main actor	Fast	Slow	Supporting role
	Automatic	Effortful	
	Frequent	Infrequent	
	Emotional	Logical	
	Subconscious	Conscious	
	Intuition	Critical examination	
	Animals and humans	Evolutionarily recent	

Much of our insight into behaviour derives from psychological study into how people make decisions

- And the fact is, people aren't very good at making the right decisions
- Despite what economists and policy makers might think we're not intuitive statisticians



This is particularly true of the kinds of issues we all work on



Photo by Mika Baumeister
on Unsplash

- “Our brains are wired to ignore climate change”, George Marshall
- “A distant problem that requires sacrifices now to avoid uncertain losses far in the future”, Daniel Kahneman
- “A psychologist could barely dream up a better scenario for paralysis”, Daniel Gilbert

Why? We use mental shortcuts called cognitive biases

Systematic patterns of deviation from norm or rationality in judgment

1. Anchoring bias.

People are **over-reliant** on the first piece of information they hear. In a salary negotiation, whoever makes the first offer establishes a range of reasonable possibilities in each person's mind.



2. Availability heuristic.

People **overestimate the importance** of information that is available to them. A person might argue that smoking is not unhealthy because they know someone who lived to 100 and smoked three packs a day.



3. Bandwagon effect.

The probability of one person adopting a belief increases based on the number of people who hold that belief. This is a powerful form of **groupthink** and is reason why meetings are often unproductive.



4. Blind-spot bias.

Failing to recognize your own cognitive biases is a bias in itself. People notice cognitive and motivational biases much more in others than in themselves.



5. Choice-supportive bias.

When you choose something, you tend to feel positive about it, even if that **choice has flaws**. Like how you think your dog is awesome – even if it bites people every once in a while.



6. Clustering illusion.

This is the tendency to **see patterns in random events**. It is key to various gambling fallacies, like the idea that red is more or less likely to turn up on a roulette table after a string of reds.



7. Confirmation bias.

We tend to listen only to information that confirms our **preconceptions** – one of the many reasons it's so hard to have an intelligent conversation about climate change.



8. Conservatism bias.

Where people favor prior evidence over new evidence or information that has emerged. People were **slow to accept** that the Earth was round because they maintained their earlier understanding that the planet was flat.



9. Information bias.

The tendency to **seek information when it does not affect action**. More information is not always better. With less information, people can often make more accurate predictions.



10. Ostrich effect.

The decision to **ignore dangerous or negative information** by "burying" one's head in the sand, like an ostrich. Research suggests that investors check the value of their holdings significantly less often during bad markets.



11. Outcome bias.

Judging a decision based on the **outcome** – rather than how exactly the decision was made in the moment. Just because you won a lot in Vegas doesn't mean gambling your money was a smart decision.

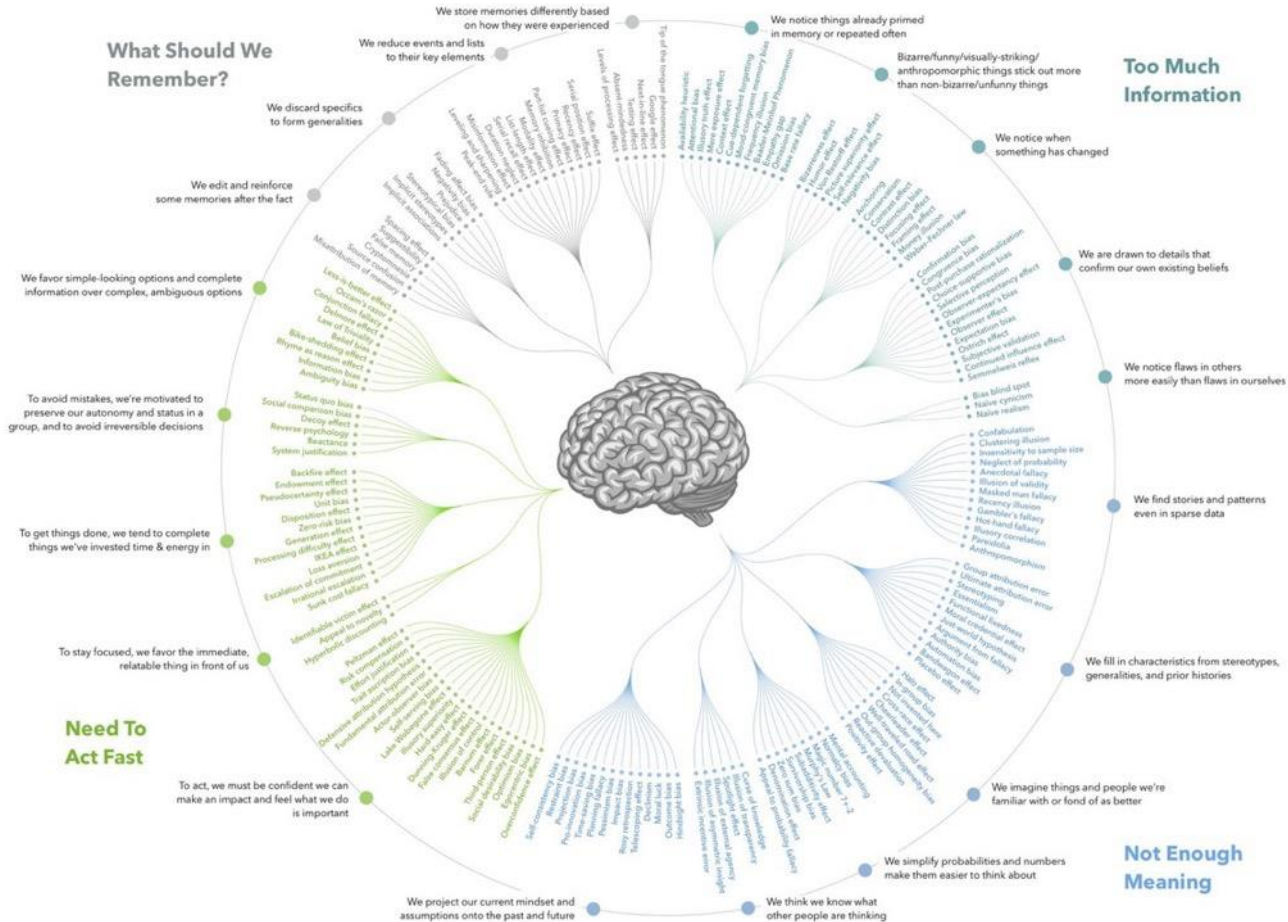


12. Overconfidence.

Some of us are **too confident about our abilities**, and this causes us to take greater risks in our daily lives. Experts are more prone to this bias than laypeople, since they are more convinced that they are right.



COGNITIVE BIAS CODEX, 2016



Why? We're heavily influenced by 'noise'

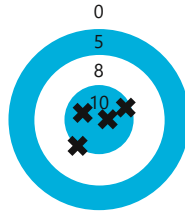
"The problem is that humans are unreliable decision makers; their judgments are strongly influenced by irrelevant factors, such as their current mood, the time since their last meal, and the weather. We call the chance variability of judgements noise."

Daniel Kahneman et al, Harvard Business Review, October 2016

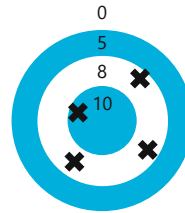
Source: <https://hbr.org/2016/10/noise>

How noise affects accuracy

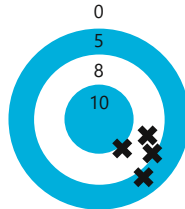
A. Accurate



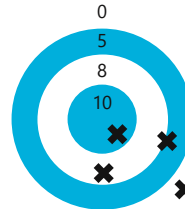
B. Noisy



C. Biased



D. Noisy and biased



It is clear that people are irrational...

... yet most of the time we design things as if they were entirely rational!



Learn a
new
recipe,
change
your
eating
habits

“As long as we construct the world around us by assuming that people have unlimited cognitive capacity and no emotions that interfere with their decisions, we will fail”

Dan Ariely



Poupe energia, poupe dinheiro

What does it mean for us practitioners...

... working directly with consumers?

If we want to **change behaviour**, we need to start with a **realistic view of the influences** on people's behaviour. If we understand better how and why people behave as they do, several **benefits** arise:

- We gain an increasingly **sophisticated understanding** of why people behave as they do
- We can **better design interventions** to change this
- This doesn't mean that changing behaviour is an exact science: most real-world behaviours are informed by a cocktail of biases and noise, which means **there are no 'silver bullets'** to change them
- But if we understand what went wrong, there is always the **opportunity to improve our interventions!**

5 key principles

To guide our work to support more sustainable behaviours among consumers



1. Knowledge ≠ action

Information **alone** is unlikely to change behaviour – just because somebody knows they should do something doesn't necessarily mean they'll do it



In many countries, attempts to increase knowledge of healthy diets has been very successful – with awareness of the “5 a day” message at up to 90%

But most people still don't actually do it

2. Attitude ≠ action

Having a positive value set or attitude towards sustainability may be important for long term change but it doesn't mean we always act accordingly



Photo by [Annie Spratt](#) on [Unsplash](#)

3. Intention ≠ action

Even intending to do something doesn't mean we will actually do it (think of all those broken new year's resolutions...)



4. Focus on what people do, not what they think or say

Which all means that if we want to change behaviour, it's behaviour we need to focus on



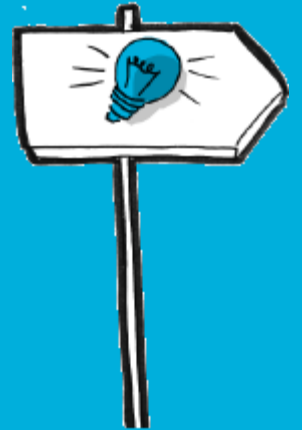
5. Create solutions as if people were irrational



By changing the plate default option, reduced by 20%,
food waste fell by almost 50%.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqU5MSxARsw>

Examples of successful interventions



We believe that great interventions come from a combination of



Nudging

Example of “talking” to system 1 by making it easier to engage



Aim: Promote healthy food choices in train station snack shops in the Netherlands

Intervention: Healthier snacks placed at the cashier of shops, instead of at the back of the store, including fruits, several types of müsli bars, cereal biscuits and crackers

Results: Sales of healthier snacks nearly doubled over a week. Disclosing its purpose with an explanatory sign did not impact the effectiveness. However, sales of unhealthy snacks remained stable.

Kroese et al. (2015)

Social norms

Example of tapping into the bias of social comparison and copying what others do



© Eduardo Soares at Unsplash

Aim: Increase fruit and vegetable demand without decreasing store profitability or increasing shopper budgets

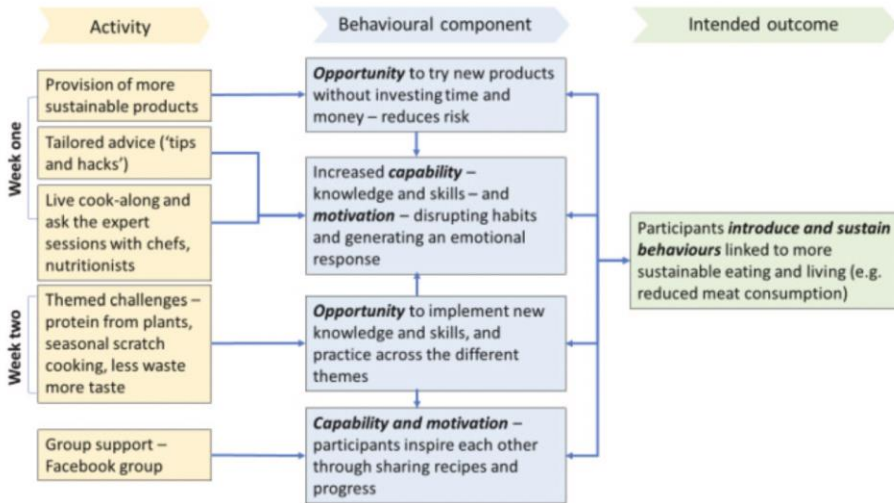
Intervention: Grocery cart placards communicated social norms detailing the number of fruits and vegetables normally purchased (descriptive norm) at particular stores (provincial norm): “In this store, most people choose at least x fruits and vegetables”

Result: Results strongly suggest that the intervention worked: average fruit and vegetable spending per day per person increased by 16% over the intervention period

Payne et al. (2015)

Targeted and personalized information & more!

Example of using information in a smart manner



Trewern et al. (2022)

Aim: Support the adoption of more sustainable food behaviours (meat consumption, food waste and scratch cooking)

Intervention: 9-week multi-component behavioral intervention based on the COM-B model implemented by a large UK food retailer. Components included knowledge enhancing inputs, e.g. 'ask the expert' sessions and an online community to clarify questions, considered the most effective

Results: Average meat consumption frequency was 5–6 times a week pre-intervention; 3–4 times a week at intervention-end; and 1–2 times a week 3 months after the intervention. Similar for F&V.

Choice editing

Example of promoting a concrete behaviour by changing the choice architecture



Photo by Kelly Sikkema at Unsplash

Aim: Phase out plastic bags in supermarkets as a response to an EU initiative of reducing plastic bags to 40 per capita by 2025

Intervention: No longer offer plastic bags at all or only offer them for a small fee

Results: 140 million fewer plastic bags end up on waste dumps each year Europe-wide

Luyken, J. (2016) Supermarket giant Rewe ditches plastic bags for good; The Local (2019) Germany to ban single-use plastic shopping bags.

Key take-home messages



Key take-home messages

1. **Humans are not acting rational**, so we should not design decision points as if they were.
2. The more we **understand underlying logics of human behaviour**, the better we can use it to guide new behaviours and avoid running into false assumptions.
3. Good insights into behaviours and attitudes of consumers is essential to have a **solid basis** to act upon and intervene.



COLLABORATING CENTRE ON SUSTAINABLE
CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Mariana Nicolau

Mariana.Nicolau@cscp.org

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mariana-a-r-nicolau/>

www.cscp.org