

Ecological Change: Niche Phenomenon or Mass Movement

Agreeing to ecological changes is one thing – adapting one's behavior is another. Because the human being is not made for renunciation. However, marketing has wonderful opportunities to address customers beyond disclaimer and initiate change.

Do "Fridays for future" represent an ecological youth movement that also leads to significant changes in behavior? Is the high level of support for the Greens a signal of an imminent serious change? What does the increasing approval of ecology and sustainability in all surveys mean? On the other hand, if we look at consumer behavior, then there are indeed changes, but still to a small extent. We know from the past that many developments had a long incubation period and then became a mass phenomenon in a very short time.

The Psychology of Sustainability

In order to dare to make a prognosis here, we have to deal with the mechanisms of our brain. Two systems in our brain determine our behavior: On the one hand, there is the emotional SELF, which represents our desires and largely determines our behavior. This system eludes our consciousness. On the other hand, there is the rational and always conscious I. The I represents our values and beliefs and acts as a controller of our SELF. So we always live in a conflict between what we want and what we are allowed to do. The I usually answers in surveys and shows a significant change in values, but its influence on the SELF remains limited. This is a first explanation for the discrepancy between attitude and behavior.

Most marketing activities are actually aimed at the I. A good example is EDEKA's campaign.



Fig.: Sustainability Communication Edeka

I can continue to shop as before with peace of mind, EDEKA takes care of sustainability. The possibly bad conscience is calmed down, nothing has to change. The I delegates the responsibility to EDEKA and the SELF continues as before.

So we have to ask ourselves how it can be possible to change the desires of our SELF and thereby also to achieve a change in behavior and a renunciation. Here the problem arises that for our brain renunciation is an absolute emergency program, which is only activated under considerable pressure. This pressure can either be social, my environment sanctions certain behaviors or the conditions are so catastrophic that I only have renunciation as a last possibility. Our brain does not know the "voluntary" renunciation out of conviction.

However, the desires of our SELF are changing very significantly and this provides new options for changing behavior in ecological terms. Here are two changes in the first place:

- Our future has become so uncertain that we are increasingly living in the now. The decisive factor is no longer what will be one day, but I now want to be happy and enjoy my life. This is accompanied by the loss of importance of success and career. A workplace where I have fun and enjoy working is more important to me than money and career.
- We don't necessarily have to own something to be able to do certain things. This change in our desires and expectations of our lives also has a decisive influence on our consumer behavior. Brands as part of one's own staging are losing importance, it has become less important to show the outside world who you are and what you have achieved. For many young adults, mobility no longer makes the car a necessity, a fashion that everyone is more or less oriented towards no longer exists, brands are no longer regarded as a self-evident guarantee of quality. Today, we are more internally guided than externally.

What does this mean for our behavior from an ecological point of view? We do not change our behavior for the sake of reason, but because we enjoy living differently, because then we have the feeling that we will be better off personally. We use sustainable products and offers when they fascinate us and are something new.

Danish architect Bjarke Ingels, builder of the new One World Towers, which stand on the square of the World Trade Center, said in an interview in „Die Zeit“ about his design of a waste heating plant that also serves as a ski slope:

"We wanted to disprove the idea that sustainability necessarily goes hand in hand with a loss of quality of life. There is a kind of protestant attitude according to which it must hurt to do good. We ask how sustainability can improve the quality of life and be fun."

Examples of successful sustainable offers

The best example of fun and fascination is Tesla. This is not just an electric car but fascinated by special features. Be it the Insane Mode, which has an acceleration of 2.7 sec. from 0 to 100 or the gullwing doors on the Model X. I don't give up on Tesla, but even get more.



Fig.: Tesla Model X

Basically, mobility is currently changing very significantly. Not only is it psychologically more attractive to go to the office on an e-bike than with an SUV, but in no area is sharing growing so fast. Companies offer e-bikes to their employees, no destination is without an offer of e-bikes or electric scooters. Cartogo proves to be a successful sharing model and advertises with the slogan "Proud to share". Again, it's not about ecology and functional benefits, but about pride in yourself and belonging to a modern-thinking community.



Fig.: Communication CAR2GO

Among the first to recognize that ecology and sustainability must be fun were the organic supermarkets. Specifically, the world of renunciation of the health food stores was left and an attractive supermarket was created both in terms of product range and design.

The supply of meatless foods is increasing significantly. However, customers buy this primarily because they feel they are eating healthier with it. A big hype has triggered Lidl with the vegan burger. The fascination was so great that the limited offer was sold out after a very short time. Again, it is the fascination of the product and not the vegan character.



Fig.: Beyond Meat Burger

Green Living and Eco-Fashion stand for a modern lifestyle that is not only ecological but also modern and innovative. Here, too, we can observe the replacement of the classic eco-providers such as hessnatur, who see themselves as timeless organic fashion.

Schwörerhaus has taken up this trend and offers a prefabricated house that clearly stands for this lifestyle.



Fig.: Green Living Space a cooperation project of the project partners SchwörerHaus, IKEA Germany

Summary

Let's summarize: Ecology and sustainability will most likely determine the consumer behavior not only of a minority but of the majority. Manufacturers and marketing must leave their alibi niche and fascinate with new products and offers. These products and offers must also meet a changing lifestyle as described.

About the author: As a psychologist, it is important to Melanie Sommer, RSG Marketing Research, to uncover the psychological and often unconscious mechanisms of consumer behavior and to translate them into actionable recommendations for her customers. RSG Marketing Research sees itself as a problem solver for the client, with the aim of really understanding the customer and making his actions comprehensible and deriving adequate action strategies based on this. The work is based on the proven psychological model of the SELF & I, which enables a differentiated explanation of consumer behavior.

Published on: 24.07.2019

The original article on german was published on marktforschung.de

RSG Marketing Research GmbH
Lindemannstr. 82
40237 Dusseldorf
Email Address: contact@selbstundich.de
Website: www.selbstundich.de