

Autora: Arancha Larranaga

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0534-908X>

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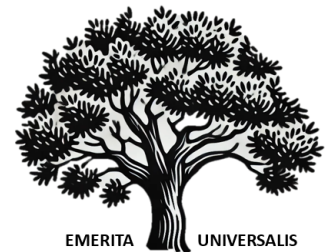
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Sustainability Myths: How Cultural Models Influence Our Eco-Perceptions

Dr. Arancha Larrañaga

Universidad Pontificia Comillas

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Introduction – why does this matter?

- Consumers increasingly demand sustainable products (Grand View Research, 2024; White et al., 2019)
- But do they accurately judge a product's environmental impact?

- **Question:**

What comes to mind when you think of a “green” product? (Poll the audience)

Sustainability myths– what’s the problem?

- Many products appear eco-friendly but are not necessarily environmentally sustainable (e.g., Herbes et al., 2020; Stennis et al., 2017)

- **Question:**

Handcrafted vs. mass-produced items—
Which is more environmentally sustainable? In what elements do you base your answer?

Why is this happening?

Psychological shortcuts in consumer decision-making

- **Individuals use folk theories or lay beliefs** that replace scientific analysis (Furnham, 1988)
- Folk theories are quick judgments without deep analysis that drives green inferences (for a review, see Larranaga & Valor, 2022)

- **Question:**

Have you ever been surprised that a “green” product wasn’t as environmentally sustainable as you thought?

Folk theories on green perception

- **If it is Artisanal production** 🏺 then is green (seen as more "natural") (Judge et al., 2020; Larranaga et al., 2025)
- **If it has an earth-toned packaging** 🌿 then is green (gives a sense of eco-friendliness) (Pancer et al., 2017)
- **If it is produced by a small brands vs. big corporations** 🏢 then it is green (perceived as more ethical) (Wood et al., 2018)

- **Question:**

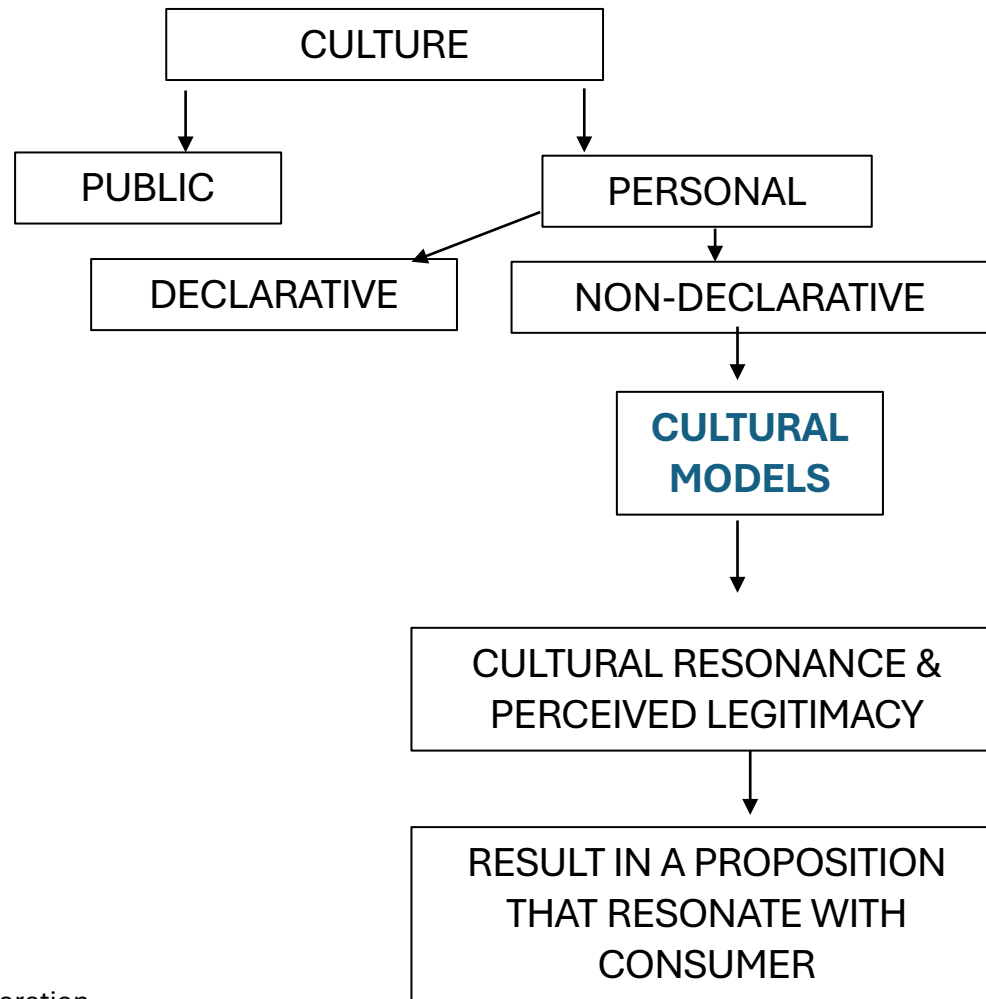
Take a pause and have a though about these folk theories influence your inferences.

However, beyond these individual folk theories, there is a role of cultural models

- A **cultural model** is a **shared system of beliefs, assumptions, and cognitive frameworks** that shape how people **interpret, categorize, and respond to the world** within a particular cultural context (Boutyline & Soter, 2021)

- These models are collectively developed and maintained through **socialization, media, advertising, and everyday interactions**, influencing perception and decision-making (Lizardo, 2017)

The role of cultural models in green perception



Some concepts (use it as a back up depending on the knowledge of the audience)

- **Public culture** refers to the **shared, external, and material aspects of culture** that exist **outside of individuals** and are available for social interaction. It includes symbols, objects, texts, settings, and societal norms that shape collective understanding and influence personal culture. (Jindra & Jindra, 2018).
- **Personal culture** refers to the **individualized, internalized aspects of culture** that people acquire and use in their daily lives. It includes learned preferences, skills, habits, and cognitive frameworks that shape how individuals interpret the world (Rotolo, 2022)

Some concepts (use it as a back up depending on the knowledge of the audience)

- **Declarative culture** refers to **explicit, consciously accessible cultural knowledge** that individuals can **articulate, reflect on, and communicate**. It includes stated beliefs, values, norms, and worldviews (Rotolo, 2022).
- **Nondeclarative culture** consists of **implicit, internalized patterns, associations, and habits** that influence perception and behavior **without conscious awareness**. It operates automatically and is difficult to verbalize (Rotolo, 2022).

The dual-process model of cognition and declarative and non-declarative culture

- **System 1 (Fast Thinking):** Emotional, intuitive, and automatic. Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Kahneman, 2011
- **System 2 (Slow Thinking):** Rational, analytical, and effortful. Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Kahneman, 2011
- Most green product decisions are made using **System 1!**

- **Question:**

Which system is aligned with declarative culture?
And which one with non-declarative culture?

Cultural Resonance & Legitimacy Reinforce Misperceptions

- Products aligned with dominant cultural models gain **perceived legitimacy** as sustainable—even when they aren't (McDonnell, 2023).
- **Example:** Handmade products are seen as greener, even if their carbon footprint is higher.

The business strategy perspective

- **Why does this matter for strategy?**

- Companies must balance branding vs. actual sustainability.
- Misaligned perceptions create market opportunities as long as companies back products with real actions

- **Challenge:**

How can firms communicate *real* sustainability effectively?

Strategic implications for companies

- **Transparency & certifications**
- **Consumer education campaigns**
- **Third-party verification**

- **Question:**
How much do consumers trust sustainability certifications? (Live poll)

Policy & Regulation – a role for governments?

- Governments can create stricter ecolabeling laws

- **Debate:**

The EU's Green Claims Directive. Discuss the <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/es/press-room/20240112IPR16772/nueva-ley-de-la-ue-que-prohibe-el-blanqueo-ecologico-y-la-informacion-enganosa>

Consumer responsibility – A call to action

- Strategies for **critical green consumption:**

- Read beyond the label.
- Compare lifecycle impacts.
- Demand transparency.

- **Question:**

Should consumers or companies bear the responsibility for environmental sustainability?

The future of sustainable strategy

- Moving beyond **perception-based** sustainability.
- Companies integrating **circular economy** principles.

- **Question:**
What innovations could reshape green marketing?

Key takeaways

- ✓ Consumers rely on psychological shortcuts.
- ✓ Cultural models influence green product perception
- ✓ Businesses must balance branding and real sustainability.
- ✓ Greenwashing is a challenge but also an opportunity.
- ✓ Strategy must align perception with reality.

Discussion & final thought

 **Final Question:** What is one thing you will do differently when evaluating “green” products?

Thank You!

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