



Unlocking Sustainable Consumption: The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Promoting Pro-Environmental and Pro-Social Engagement

Aistė Čapienė

Vytautas Magnus University Agriculture Academy



Introduction

In recent years, as the world's population grows and technology advances, the natural resources are being exploited at a faster pace, making the issue of sustainable consumption a crucial one (Ercan, Ural, Köse, 2017). This issue, in a broad sense, is also a topic of interest in many foreign countries (Geiger, Fischer, and Schrader, 2018; Balderjahn et al., 2013; Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019; Vivek et al., 2014; White, Habib and Dahl, 2020) and Lithuania (Banytė et al. 2020; Piligrimienė et al. 2020; Čapienė, Rūteliūnė and Tvaronavičienė, 2021). Links between sustainable consumption and various psychological constructs - personality traits, locus of control, motivation, emotions, etc., have been studied for quite some time (Ercan, Ural, Köse, 2017).

Recently, researchers have started to focus on the construct of emotional intelligence in order to show that higher emotional intelligence is associated with sustainable consumption behaviour (Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019). Individual studies have analysed e.g. emotional intelligence moderating role between consumer engagement in environmental issues and sustainable consumption (Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019). The literature analyses not only the socially desirable - sustainable consumption behaviour - but also the dark side of consumption - materialism and compulsive buying. The Lithuanian study Consumer Materialism: Causes and Consequences (LMTLT, No. S-MIP-20-12) studies in detail the links between materialism, compulsive buying, emotional intelligence, subjective well-being, and coping strategies, reveals the main causes and consequences of consumer materialism, and provides practical implications for reducing the tendency of consumers to be materialistic and to engage in compulsive buying (Rūteliūnė, Šeinauskienė, Lekavičienė, Nikou, Antinienė). Emotional competencies, which define the expression of certain specific emotional skills, are used by many authors in the context of the analysis of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996, Bru-Luna et al, 2021, Gilar-Corbi et al, 2019, Gilar-Corbi, Pozo-Rico, Sánchez and Castejón, 2018).

In general, emotional intelligence is associated with an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and manage their own and other people's emotions. Emotions are also involved in making consumption decisions. Moreover, the level of emotional intelligence is related to an individual's happiness, health, and overall well-being. All these aspects also affect an individual's choices, including those related to daily use. There is a consensus among scientists that successful promotion of sustainable consumption could significantly reduce risks to human health and the environment. Researchers in the scientific literature also provide insights that fast and emotion-based decisions are rarely associated with sustainable consumption behaviors, suggesting that the development of emotional intelligence might have a positive effect on sustainable consumption behaviors. As no research analyzing the direct causal links between the development of emotional intelligence and sustainable consumption could be found in the foreign and Lithuanian scientific literature, it was decided to develop this research. Development of consumers' emotional competencies towards sustainable consumption, which aims to explain and gain insights into the importance of developing emotional competencies in promoting sustainable consumption behaviors. To sum up, it can be stated that there are very few and fragmentary studies abroad looking for links between sustainable consumption and emotional intelligence, while in Lithuania no studies of this kind could be found, with the exception of the aforementioned one, which is descriptive in nature. The aim of this research is to explore the theoretical links between sustainable consumption and emotional intelligence.

Methodology

This theoretical exploration delves into the intricate dynamics of sustainable consumption through the lens of emotional intelligence (EI) and its potential to stimulate pro-environmental and pro-social engagement. Our approach integrates existing knowledge from psychology, environmental studies, and consumer behavior. The research design of this study hinges upon a conceptual framework that elucidates the interplay between emotional intelligence and sustainable consumption behaviors. A comprehensive literature review forms the bedrock of this theoretical inquiry, encompassing diverse disciplines to identify key theories, empirical evidence, and gaps in understanding. In this research were used the methods such as literature review, conceptual analysis, theoretical synthesis, comparative analysis, and test theoretical frameworks without necessarily involving empirical data collection or experimentation.

Results

Sustainable consumption behaviour is purposeful and efficient (i.e. problem-solving) and future-oriented, as it addresses the needs of future generations at the same time as the needs of the current generation are met (Bonnes and Bonaiuto, 2002). According to K. White, R. Habib and D. W. Dahl (2020), sustainable consumption behaviour encompasses the entire the entire consumption process, including information seeking, decision making, product or behavioural choice, use and disposal of the product or service in ways that lead to more sustainable results. This gap in intentional behaviour is very often observed in sustainability contexts (Park & Lin, 2020; Diddi et al., 2020). According to Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2019), the ability to understand and manage emotions increases consumer engagement in sustainable consumption. Furthermore, emotional intelligence as the ability to understand one's own and other individuals' emotions, to control them and to make thoughtful decisions (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2000), can be developed. K. Sethia and S. Srinivas (2011) argued that a consumer's mindset guides and shapes their behaviour, which can be sustainable or unsustainable. Quick and emotion-based decisions are rarely associated with sustainable consumption behaviour (Trudel, 2019).

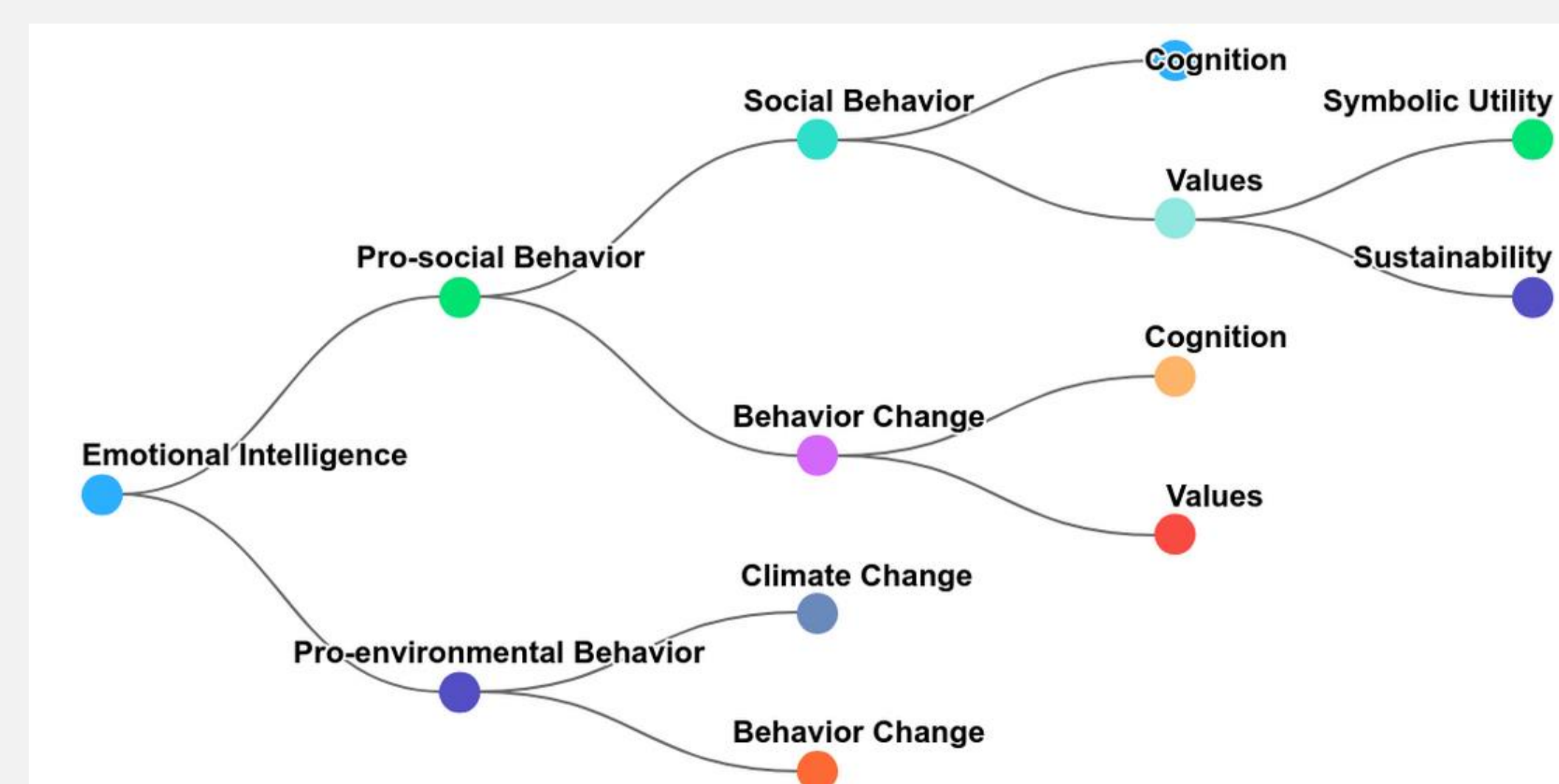


Fig. 1 Relations between emotion intelligences, pro-environmental and pro-social behaviour and sustainable consumption

Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2019) conducted a conceptual framework study revealing that emotional intelligence serves as a moderator in the relationship between consumer engagement and pro-environmental as well as pro-social consumption behaviors. Building upon this, Sarkar et al. (2022) further elucidated the pivotal role of emotional intelligence, both trait-based and ability-based, in explaining the impact of physical activity and exercise on sustainable consumption behaviors.

Results

Moreover, Lisboa et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review focusing on adolescents and their pro-environmental behavior, unveiling significant associations between specific personality traits, emotional intelligence, and pro-environmental behavior among adolescents. These findings collectively underscore the importance of emotional intelligence as a key determinant in shaping consumer engagement and pro-environmental behavior, thereby highlighting its relevance in fostering sustainable consumption practices.

Recent scientific inquiries have delved into the intricate nexus between psychological factors and sustainable consumption behaviors, offering valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms driving environmentally responsible choices. Zannakis et al. (2019) findings revealed a positive relationship between green consumer behaviors and subjectively evaluated resources, such as emotional support, underscoring the role of psychological factors in shaping sustainable consumption practices. Furthermore, Sarkar et al. (2022) research underscored the significance of emotional intelligence and sustainability claims in influencing consumer behaviors towards sustainability, shedding light on the psychological underpinnings of sustainable consumption. In elucidating the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social engagement, Hossain et al. (2022) investigated tourists' emotional intelligence and its impact on environmentally responsible behavior. Their study revealed that tourists' perception of emotion relating to self and others positively influenced civil, physical, and persuasive actions, highlighting the role of emotional intelligence in fostering pro-social behaviors. Moreover, Odame et al. (2022) explored the role of emotional intelligence among students in promoting sustainable development goals, emphasizing its importance in achieving sustainable outcomes. Addressing the key components of emotional intelligence and sustainable consumption, Okur-Berberoglu (2018) aimed to develop an ecoliteracy scale integrating ecological intelligence, social intelligence, emotional intelligence, and economy. Their study revealed a direct link between ecological intelligence and green consumer behaviors, emphasizing the importance of cognitive and emotional factors in fostering environmentally responsible choices. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2019) findings highlighted the interactive effects of trait emotional intelligence on promoting pro-environmental behaviors, providing valuable insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying sustainable consumption practices.

Main conclusions

In conclusion, the convergence of recent scientific investigations underscores the pivotal role of psychological factors, particularly emotional intelligence, in driving sustainable consumption behaviors. While consumers aspire to adopt more sustainable practices, the translation of these intentions into long-term behaviors remains a challenge. However, studies reveal that emotional intelligence can serve as a moderator, influencing consumer engagement and pro-environmental actions. However, recent research has shed light on the pivotal role of emotional intelligence in driving sustainable consumption practices. Studies have shown that emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between consumer engagement and pro-environmental behaviors, indicating its significance in fostering environmentally responsible choices. Additionally, emotional intelligence influences various aspects of sustainable consumption. The findings underscore the importance of cognitive and emotional factors in shaping sustainable consumption behaviors and highlight the potential for emotional intelligence interventions to promote positive social and environmental change.