

THE CONSUMER-ACTOR IN THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA: PROPOSING THE CONCEPT OF ECO-LUCIDITY THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF MEANINGFUL ACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes to define the concept of eco-lucidity as a new framework for exploring consumers' social responsibility through their commitment and behavior. In response to environmental challenges, such as climate change and resource depletion, eco-lucidity offers an alternative to traditional approaches that rely on fear and guilt. Instead, it emphasizes proactive and coherent engagement, awareness, and conscious action, encouraging consumers to align their values with sustainable practices. The article argues that eco-lucidity builds on a deeper sense of responsibility toward the planet and society, promoting long-term behavioral change through informed, intentional actions. This research suggests that companies can use eco-lucidity to build meaningful connections with customers by integrating environmental consciousness into their business models. Aside from the jolt and the nudge theories, relying on external shocks or subtle incentives, eco-lucidity offers an intermediate approach that combines motivation with progressive, measurable steps, reducing psychological reactance while nurturing eco-conscious behaviors. This new concept called eco-lucidity can help companies and public institutions understand the influence of consumers' awareness on their emotions and in turn on their commitment and behavior. The aim is to give insight to improve sustainability of products and services and to increase the CSR level of companies, for example in the luxury sector.

Keywords: Eco-lucidity, Sustainability, Environmental engagement, Corporate social responsibility, Anthropocene, Consumer-actor, Consumer behavior, Meaningful actions, Marketing, Luxury.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental challenges, such as climate change, have tangible repercussions on citizens, disrupting their daily lives and fostering a global awareness of the need for action. These impacts include extreme weather events, threats to biodiversity, and increasing pressure on natural resources, which pose significant challenges to lives and livelihoods – issues that the recent November 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku sought to address. In response to these upheavals, consumer behavior has undergone a significant transformation. Previously passive, individuals now increasingly adopt active roles as “consum’actors” (Rumpala, 2011) engaging in eco-responsible choices. This shift highlights two distinct

consumer postures: the passive consumer, often driven by emotions such as guilt and anxiety, and the active consumer, motivated by awareness and a willingness to act. Consequently, it becomes essential to revisit traditional psychological and marketing approaches, which have historically focused on negative emotions, and instead introduce positive, action-oriented concepts such as awareness, lucidity, engagement, and action.

In a context where brands, including those in the luxury sector, are increasingly expected to meet rising demands for social and environmental responsibility (CSR), this article explores how the concept of eco-lucidity can encourage concrete and responsible behaviors, moving beyond mere feelings of guilt. The objective is to propose a measurement model for this active engagement, providing companies with a practical framework to promote and support eco-responsible actions among their consumers.

The article will begin with a literature review exploring key concepts and existing research in the field. It will then introduce an original conceptual proposal to enhance the theoretical framework. Finally, the discussion will highlight the practical implications of this proposal while providing a critical comparison with existing theories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 2000, and more particularly since 2015, the concepts of eco-anxiety, eco-guilt, and eco-grief have emerged to explain consumers' emotional responses to environmental challenges (Albrecht, 2005). These notions, extensively studied in psychological and environmental literature, highlight negative emotional reactions such as anxiety and guilt, which emerge when individuals become aware of the consequences of their behaviors on the environment (Hogg et al., 2021; Clayton & Manning, 2018; Reser & Swim, 2011). Various psychometric scales were developed to measure these emotions, such as those by Hogg et al. (2021), which assess perceived environmental anxiety, or the works of Zeier & Wessa (2024) and Ágoston et al. (2022), which examine eco-emotions, eco-guilt, and their behavioral impacts.

These concepts rest on the premise that fear, and guilt can act as triggers for pro-environmental behaviors (Heidegger, 1927; Dupuy, 2022). Notably, Heidegger emphasized that fear of imminent catastrophes, such as the symbolic "doomsday", can mobilize individuals to avert adverse outcomes. Similarly, Dupuy (2022) explored how awareness of looming disasters can serve as a catalyst for significant behavioral change. These theories are often associated with the *jolt theory* (Levin, 2000; Burnes & Cooke, 2013), which posits that major environmental events or shocks prompt collective awareness and the adoption of new practices (Meyer, 1982). However, while these emotions are effective in raising awareness, they do not always lead to sustained action across all individuals.

One major limitation of fear or guilt-based concepts lies in their potential to provoke psychological reactance, a defense mechanism where individuals resist directives perceived as threats to their freedom (Brehm & Brehm, 2013). This reactance is particularly pronounced among climate skeptics or individuals who feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of environmental issues (Hornsey et al., 2018). Negative emotions, while powerful in creating awareness, can also result in avoidance or feelings of helplessness, thereby hindering action.

An important gap in the literature remains: although eco-anxiety and eco-guilt are well-studied and measurable, there is a scarcity of tools to capture consumers' positive and proactive engagement with environmental challenges. This gap underpins the need for a new concept, eco-lucidity, which emphasizes motivation, commitment, and tangible actions to address ecological challenges, inspired by research on collective action (Ostrom, 1990; Schlager, 2012) and

education in the Anthropocene (Steffen et al., 2007). The Anthropocene refers to the current geological era, characterized by significant human economic and industrial activity that has profoundly altered Earth's ecosystems and geology (*ibid*). It seeks to go beyond mere awareness and foster observable and lasting action.

Limitations of Current Approaches

Fear and guilt-based approaches, while effective in generating short-term awareness, face significant limitations when it comes to promoting durable behavioral changes. These strategies often rely on catastrophic scenarios, such as the irreversible effects of climate change (Hulme, 2009; Hulme, 2015), which can lead to avoidance or denial, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the "ostrich policy" (Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001). Faced with alarming messages, many consumers prefer to ignore problems rather than confront them, hindering the adoption of eco-responsible practices.

Resistance to imposed practices also represents a significant barrier. When strategies are perceived as coercive or guilt-inducing, they can trigger psychological reactance, a defense mechanism where individuals reject behaviors, they feel are being imposed on them (Brehm & Brehm, 2013). This phenomenon is particularly evident among climate skeptics or those overwhelmed by environmental demands (Hornsey et al., 2018). In such cases, guilt-based approaches exacerbate resistance rather than encouraging action.

To address these limitations, alternative approaches such as *nudges* have emerged. Popularized by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), this method relies on subtle, non-coercive incentives to influence behavior. These gradual changes leverage cognitive biases and simplify decision-making. For example, default eco-friendly options or the inclusion of visible environmental labels make sustainable choices more accessible (Sunstein & Reisch, 2014). While promising, these small steps need to be integrated into a broader vision to maximize their impact.

In marketing, another limitation lies in how consumers are traditionally perceived. They are often depicted as selfish actors, primarily motivated by self-interest (Cristini et al., 2024, Kotler & Armstrong, 2019) and operating under a model of *dominant social paradigm* (Cristini et al., 2024; Varey, 2010). This paradigm places consumption decisions at the service of the economy and production, relegating ethical and environmental considerations to a secondary role. Such a vision, closely tied to purely economic objectives, limits the scope and credibility of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies (Bansal & Roth, 2000).

A paradigm shift is thus necessary. Businesses and researchers must rethink strategies by placing collective and eco-responsible considerations at the heart of marketing practices (Varey, 2010). This transformation requires acknowledging that consumers are not solely driven by individual gains but can also act as agents of change, motivated by values, tangible actions, and a desire to contribute to a sustainable future (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom, 2009). This conceptual shift could pave the way for more inclusive and effective approaches, where small actions, such as those promoted by nudges, are embedded in a collective ecological transformation dynamic.

CONCEPTUAL PROPOSAL

Eco-lucidity is a concept that emphasizes the motivation of individuals to engage in sustainable practices, not through feelings of guilt, but rather through heightened awareness and a commitment to measurable and impactful actions. Unlike ecological guilt, which centers on

negative emotions, eco-lucidity focuses on fostering proactive and intentional eco-responsible behaviors that are independent of specific industries or contexts.

Theoretical Eco-Lucidity

Eco-lucidity is achieved when individuals cultivate a deep connection with themselves, others, and the environment, aligning their beliefs about what constitutes "a good life" (*eudaimonia*) with principles of sustainability and ethical responsibility (Rosa, 2017). This connection reflects an understanding that genuine happiness is intertwined with ecological integrity and the well-being of others, emphasizing a life of meaning rooted in respect for the planet.

Behavioral Eco-Lucidity

Eco-lucid individuals, who understand the Anthropocene's urgency, go beyond theoretical awareness to embody their values through deliberate and consistent actions aimed at reducing their ecological footprint. They are acutely aware of the broader impact of their choices on the environment and society and actively seek to minimize harm. By aligning their beliefs with concrete behaviors, they exemplify a lifestyle that integrates environmental responsibility with personal and collective well-being.

This dual framework of eco-lucidity—both theoretical and behavioral—provides a comprehensive lens to understand and promote sustainable consumer practices driven by informed agency rather than reactive emotions.

Integrating Nudge Theory and Anthropocene Awareness in Eco-Lucidity

Eco-lucidity, as a conceptual framework, embodies the integration of individual responsibility and collective action within the paradigm of sustainable consumption. Building on theories of collective behavior (Ostrom, 2009; Reuben, 2003) and proactive change in sustainable marketing (Cristini et al., 2024; Helm et al., 2024), this approach fosters a collaborative vision where consumers are empowered as agents of ecological transition. By weaving together, the principles of nudge theory and education in the Anthropocene, eco-lucidity emerges as a conscious and rational form of engagement that encourages the acceptance of temporary discomfort for the achievement of a durable collective benefit.

Nudge theory, introduced by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), offers a subtle yet powerful mechanism to guide consumer behavior without coercion. In the context of eco-lucidity, nudges could involve structural shifts in choice architecture—such as default eco-friendly options, visual prompts emphasizing sustainability, or systems that reward low-impact consumption. These interventions are particularly potent when addressing the inertia associated with ecological transitions, as they reduce psychological barriers and simplify sustainable decision-making. For instance, luxury brands could implement nudges by promoting circular economy models, such as buy-back schemes for upcycled materials, or by embedding sustainability labels prominently on product packaging.

At the same time, education about the Anthropocene serves as a crucial complement to nudge-based interventions. Cristini et al. (2024) highlight fostering awareness of humanity's collective footprint underscores the importance of the urgency of adopting behaviors that align with planetary boundaries. Eco-lucidity builds on this educational foundation to cultivate a sense

of resonance, as conceptualized by Rosa (2017), where beings perceive their actions as part of a broader, interconnected ecosystem. This perspective shifts the focus from short-term individual gains to long-term collective well-being, fostering a mindset where sustainability is not merely an obligation but a shared commitment to a thriving Anthropocene.

The interplay between nudges and an edifying education in the Anthropocene within the framework of eco-lucidity offers a balanced approach that transcends traditional guilt- or fear-based models. Unlike the jolt theory, which relies on environmental shocks (Cristini et al., 2024) to induce behavioral change, or the incremental adjustments of nudge theory, eco-lucidity seeks to align conscious motivation with progressive, measurable actions. This hybrid approach not only mitigates resistance but also empowers consumers to become co-creators of sustainable futures. By emphasizing both micro-level interventions and macro-level awareness, eco-lucidity aligns individual aspirations with collective ecological imperatives, setting the stage for a transformative shift in consumption and marketing practices.

Proposal of the Concept of Eco-lucidity

Modern society is characterized by constant growth, social acceleration, and ongoing innovation (Rosa, 2017). German sociologist and political scientist Hartmut Rosa argues that the pursuit of profit, productivity, and technological progress has left people disconnected from one another.

Rosa argues that this focus on the expansion of resources and options leads to alienation (understood as the inability to connect with others, regardless of who and what they are) rather than deeper satisfaction (Rosa, 2017). As human beings are overwhelmed by infinite choices, they lack the time or capacity to engage meaningfully. Viewing resources as ends in themselves, rather than as tools for a meaningful life, creates a gap between the promise of happiness and the reality of an overworked and dissatisfied society. This paradox emerges when people accumulate more while experiencing a decline in their quality of life—a consequence of alienation tied to a worldview reduced to a mere set of resources to control.

Overconsumption does not bring lasting happiness; instead, it fuels frustration and an insatiable desire for more. In this context, alienation refers to a disconnection from meaningful relationships with others and the environment. The emphasis on accumulation, control, and constant availability fosters isolation, leaving people increasingly detached from themselves and others.

In response, Rosa proposes the concept of "resonance" as a framework for a good life (*eudaimonia*), emphasizing meaningful connections over resource accumulation. As long as individuals do not experience resonant interactions, they remain alienated (that is, unable to deeply connect with others). For Rosa, human beings are fundamentally resonant beings (Corrêa et al., 2021). In other words, they thrive in a relational anthropology that connects humans to one another, to the world, and to their objects (Fuchs, 2020).

As Rosa asserts, we are above all resonant beings (*ibid*) – that is, human beings who are continuously engaged in bidirectional (or more) relationships. While the relentless focus on accumulation, control, and competition promotes isolation rather than connection, leaving individuals detached from themselves and others, resonant experiences – whether social, material, or spiritual (Rosa, 2017) – nurture meaningful bonds. These three types of resonant experiences align with distinct axes of resonance: horizontal, diagonal, and vertical. The horizontal axis encompasses connections such as family relationships, friendships, and political interactions. The diagonal axis extends to our engagement with objects, work, education, and

consumption. Finally, the vertical axis represents a higher realm of resonance, associated with transcendence, encompassing religion, nature, and art (Fuchs, 2020). These experiences help individuals feel more in tune with themselves and others, regardless of their interlocutor or environment. Through such resonant experiences, which enable a relational ontology (where both the subject and the world emerge from processes of resonant interactions) (Corrêa et al., 2021), we argue that human beings can become eco-lucid: individuals who, by being connected to themselves and others, align their beliefs about "a good life" with actions that embody it (Rosa, 2017). Eco-lucid individuals are deeply aware of their impact on the environment and the world. They consciously choose to limit their actions to minimize harm, striving to reduce their ecological footprint as much as possible.

This eco-lucidity is rooted in the concept of resonance – a mutually responsive relationship where individuals are not only capable of being touched by the world but also of touching it in return through their actions. Resonance occurs when the world “strikes a chord within a person”, and, in turn, the person is able to “strike a chord in the world” (Fuchs, 2020, p.354). Resonant individuals seek to imbue their actions with meaning, fostering connections with the world that align with an eco-lucid approach.

Eco-lucidity encompasses a wide range of actions, including how we consume, travel, feed ourselves, work, choose leisure activities, and regulate heating or cooling. It involves adopting a low-tech approach and making mindful decisions that prioritize sustainability and harmony with the environment. Through resonant actions, eco-lucid individuals aim to live meaningfully while contributing to a more balanced and conscientious relationship with the world.

DISCUSSION

Eco-lucidity presents an innovative approach that contrasts sharply with traditional sustainable marketing models based on fear and guilt (Helm et al., 2024). By moving away from the use of negative emotional triggers, which can often lead to psychological resistance or avoidance behaviors (reactance), eco-lucidity favors a more positive approach that promotes proactive consumer motivation. This model is built on conscious engagement, grounded in measurable and tangible actions, translating ecological awareness into concrete steps. Eco-lucidity, therefore, is a new concept that neither relies on outside unexpected crises to drive action – e.g., Jolt Theory (Cristini et al., 2024) – nor on more subtle nudging techniques.

This approach expands the understanding of eco-responsible behavior by emphasizing personal commitment and individual responsibility (Fu et al., 2023), while also incorporating measurable and visible actions. For businesses, particularly those in the luxury sector, adopting the concept of eco-lucidity could serve as a significant strategic lever, allowing the measurement and valorization of their customers' ecological engagement. For instance, integrating eco-lucidity into marketing practices would enable consumers to understand that a good life (*eudaimonia*, Rosa, 2017) is not a fragmented approach in being able to solely be happy and ecological at home, but would also extend to all other activities, including consuming behaviors, like the selection of eco-friendly and durable products or the adoption of sustainable consumption patterns.

Connecting Eco-Lucidity to Marketing

In the marketing field, eco-lucidity offers a refreshing perspective that goes beyond traditional messages aiming to provoke feelings of guilt or shame. Rather than focusing on

negative emotions to drive change, eco-lucidity leans on concepts of personal engagement, self-responsibility, and contribution to a common good. Sustainable and social marketing, through the lens of eco-lucidity, could thus adopt a more collaborative and positive approach, encouraging consumers to actively participate in the ecological transition (Cristini & Kauppinen-Raisanen, 2022).

The main challenge lies in how businesses could integrate this concept into their marketing strategies. While adopting eco-lucidity might seem difficult due to the absence of immediate "success" metrics (such as direct increases in sales or profitability), there are promising venues for promoting this model. For instance, a company could encourage consumers to adopt measurable actions aligned with coherent sustainable consumption dimensions such as recyclability (of the products that will own different lives) and frugality (consuming less but better). Communicating these thorough actions through transparent commitments could significantly enhance the brand's credibility and foster an emotional connection with consumers. For example, consumer eco-lucidity could be used by the luxury industry to solve the apparent incompatibility between luxury products and sustainability as this type of products can be considered unnecessary.

Additionally, brands could target X, Y and Z generations, as they are increasingly attuned to sustainability issues and actively seeking out responsible companies, while used to consume a lot. This targeting of the three generations should be done in an inclusive manner for more efficiency. The concept of eco-lucidity could be integrated into educational campaigns aimed at raising awareness among this demographic about more responsible consumption choices. Following the international mega success of the song "Happy" in 2013 by Pharrell Williams (author, singer, and producer) which has galvanized the whole world, people have felt happy (and perhaps altruistic) being connected to the rest of the world, epitomizing relational anthropology. To achieve this, it would be essential to introduce the concept at an early age through educational strategies in schools and universities as the SDG 4 advocates (reform society through educational reforms). Millennials represent a key demographic for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and by creating meaningful experiences that encourage them to adopt eco-responsible behaviors, companies can not only promote more sustainable products but also build long-term consumer loyalty.

The Non-Adoption of Eco-Lucidity by Companies

Despite its obvious advantages, the adoption of eco-lucidity by businesses could encounter several challenges. One of the main obstacles lies in the lack of measurable models and immediate indicators, in contrast to traditional marketing approaches where the impact on sales or profit is easier to quantify. Integrating eco-lucidity requires a shift in how businesses perceive long-term value and sustainability. There is a need to rethink profitability by aligning economic objectives with societal and environmental values over the long term.

Moreover, businesses may fear that adopting an ethical and responsible model might reduce their competitiveness or lead to increased costs. However, studies show that consumers, particularly younger generations, are increasingly willing to support companies that adopt sustainable and responsible practices. In this context, integrating eco-lucidity into marketing strategies could be seen not only as an opportunity for businesses to differentiate themselves but also to attract more conscious and loyal consumers.

In summary, eco-lucidity offers an innovative approach to promoting sustainable consumption behaviors that go beyond traditional approaches relying on fear. In addition, eco-

lucidity corroborates the jolt and nudges effects. By emphasizing conscious motivation and incremental actions, it facilitates the adoption of eco-responsible behaviors without triggering psychological reactance. If businesses, particularly those in the luxury sector, successfully incorporate this concept into their marketing practices, they can not only align with the increasing consumer demand for sustainability but also play a pivotal role in driving a societal shift towards more mindful and environmentally respectful consumption. In the current era of the consumer-actor, individuals seem to be ready to have their behavior in line with their conscious understanding of their connection to the rest of the world, embodying the definition of eco-lucidity.

Practical Implications for the Luxury Sector

In the luxury sector, most consumers seek a mix of functional value (usability, uniqueness, and quality), individual value (self-identity, materialism, and hedonism) and social value (prestige) (Wiedmann et al., 2009), with the latter two often appearing incompatible with sustainability. The concept of eco-lucidity offers an opportunity to rethink approaches to CSR by emphasizing marketing and communication strategies that foster motivation and engagement, rather than solely focusing on profit maximization. This shift could help companies connect with consumers on a deeper level, promoting eco-consciousness and measured growth rather than relentless consumption, which would improve business ethics overall. By encouraging a transition toward eco-lucid practices, luxury brands can redefine their positioning to align with sustainable values, advocating for responsible growth that minimizes harm while fostering collective well-being and enhancing the common good.

CONCLUSION

This article presents the concept of eco-lucidity as a novel framework for encouraging sustainable consumer behavior on a large scale, particularly within the context of luxury brands. Unlike traditional approaches that leverage negative emotions such as fear and guilt, eco-lucidity emphasizes proactive engagement and meaningful connections with the environment. It suggests that consumers can make informed, intentional decisions that align their values with sustainable practices, fostering a deeper sense of responsibility toward both the planet and society. By focusing on positive motivation rather than coercion, eco-lucidity has the potential to promote measurable changes in consumer behavior and contribute to a more responsible and balanced approach to consumption.

In the luxury sector, adopting eco-lucidity could represent a strategic shift towards coherent corporate social responsibility that prioritizes consumer education and environmental consciousness over profit maximization. This approach offers an opportunity for brands to cultivate a genuine, long-lasting connection with their customers, promoting eco-friendly behaviors without inducing reactance or avoidance. Luxury brands can redefine their positioning by integrating eco-lucidity into their business models, advocating for responsible growth, and fostering collective well-being.

Eco-lucidity, as a new concept, aims to replace traditional approaches like eco-anxiety and eco-guilt with a focus on active consumer engagement. In the context of societal change, this concept goes beyond simple awareness to encourage concrete, positive actions toward others, thereby setting in motion a virtuous rather than a vicious circle. The role of social marketing, counteracting the dominant social paradigm (DSP) that has long driven accelerated

consumption, can now help imbue meaning and slow down the consumption-driven society. By fostering a shift toward contributing to a "good life" (*eudaimonia*), eco-lucidity encourages a return to values that prioritize well-being over endless consumption, in line with Rosa's notion of resonance 2017.

As an addition to traditional models like the jolt theory and the nudge theory, eco-lucidity as an alternative to the fear and guilt-based approach to sustainability, this intermediate approach not only mitigates psychological reactance but also nurtures a sustainable, eco-conscious mindset among consumers, fostering lasting behavior change. Moving forward, empirical research to test the application of eco-lucidity across various sectors could further validate its potential and refine strategies for encouraging widespread adoption of eco-responsible behaviors.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is limited to a conceptual discussion, and future research could involve quantitative surveys to test the acceptance of eco-lucidity among a broader sample of consumers from different sectors. Furthermore, extending this concept to other sectors could be explored to maximize its applicability and further understand its potential in diverse industries.

Qualitative research involving interviews with managers could provide valuable insights into their perspectives on eco-lucidity, not only from the standpoint of consumer behavior but also in terms of corporate strategies. Understanding how businesses perceive and potentially adopt eco-lucidity principles could bridge the gap between consumer-driven sustainability efforts and organizational practices. Additionally, quantitative studies are needed to validate the application of eco-lucidity across various sectors. These studies could measure consumer behavior to assess the impact of this novel approach on environmental engagement and sustainable practices.

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