Navigating value conflict: examining the impact of consumers green and materialistic value conflict on behavioral change

Rita Markauskaitė and Aušra Rūtelionė

Abstract

Purpose – *This study aims to extend cognitive dissonance theory by examining how consumers' conflict between green and materialistic values relates to psychological discomfort and motivation to change consumption behavior. It also examines the role of psychological discomfort in these relationships.*

Design/methodology/approach – *A survey was conducted in Lithuania using an online standardized questionnaire administered to a stratified random sample of adults aged 18–65 (*n = *600).*

Findings – *The results indicate that green and materialistic value conflict significantly increases psychological discomfort, and psychological discomfort positively predicts motivation to change consumption behavior. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that psychological discomfort mediates the relationship between green and materialistic value conflict and motivation to change consumption behavior.*

Originality/value – *This study fills an important research gap by examining how the conflict between green and materialistic values influences psychological discomfort and motivation to change consumption behavior, thereby extending cognitive dissonance theory. Furthermore, this study highlights the role of psychological discomfort as a moderator between materialistic and green value conflict and motivation to change behavior. The findings underscore the importance of internal psychological processes in explaining consumers' motivation to reduce consumption.*

Keywords *Value conflict, Psychological discomfort, Motivation to change, Green values, Materialistic values*

Paper type *Research paper*

Rita Markauskaitė and Aušra Rūtelionė are both based at School of Economics and Business, Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania.

1. Introduction

Modern society faces a wide range of environmental challenges, including climate change, land degradation and pollution, largely resulting from human activities. According to Yadav and Dahiya (2025), climate change, as a consequence of human activities, is leading to rising temperatures, species loss, sea-level rise, water scarcity, declining biodiversity and reduced food and resource availability, all of which have serious implications for human health, security and livelihoods. Scientists worldwide have consistently warned about the detrimental effects of human actions on the planet (Hogg *et al.*, 2024; Plechatá *et al.*, 2025). According to Ogiemwonyi *et al.* (2023), the environmental challenges have increased people's concern about the environment. Research indicates that individuals increasingly recognize the direct impact of environmental problems on their daily lives and well-being. 78% of respondents report that environmental issues directly affect their daily lives and health, highlighting widespread public awareness of these challenges. Furthermore, 84% of respondents agree that EU environmental legislation is necessary to protect their country's environment, reflecting strong public support for environmental protection policies across Europe (Eurobarometer, 2023). According to Faelli (2023), a Bain and Company survey found that more than half of respondents expressed strong concerns about sustainability,

Received 20 June 2025
Revised 2 February 2026
18 April 2026
Accepted 24 April 2026

noting that these concerns had intensified over the past year due to extreme weather events. The findings indicate that both Generation Z and Baby Boomers worldwide care about environmental issues and show a willingness to choose environmentally friendly products, pay a premium for sustainable goods, and consider factors such as product reusability, durability and waste reduction. Overall, the results indicate a growing consumer awareness of environmental challenges and their impact on everyday life (Faelli, 2023). The importance of behavioral change in addressing climate change has gained more attention recently. However, simply knowing about climate issues and understanding how individual actions can help mitigate them is not enough to ensure a more sustainable lifestyle (Vieira *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, despite increasing environmental awareness, many consumers continue to be led by materialistic values (Liobikienė *et al.*, 2020; Antinienė *et al.*, 2021). According to Dittmar and Isham (2022), an attitude in which people perceive that they purchase products for personal purpose – such as to increase their joy or happiness or to demonstrate social status – can be described as a materialistic value orientation. The European Environment Agency (2024) notes that Europeans are purchasing and discarding more clothing, footwear, and other textiles than ever before, putting increased pressure on the environment. Many consumers still prioritize the acquisition of new material goods (Dholakia *et al.*, 2018), often influenced by messages that equate material possessions with success and well-being (Kasser, 2017). Materialism has been linked to increased consumption (Richins, 2011), negative environmental outcomes (Hurst *et al.*, 2013) and reduced well-being – for both individuals and society (Kasser, 2018). Furthermore, Dittmar and Isham (2022) found that materialistic values are associated with lower concern for environmental protection, which in turn reduces engagement in pro-environmental behaviors. Furchheim *et al.* (2020) identified a value conflict between green and materialistic values. While consumers are increasingly adopting environmentally friendly consumption choices, many still hold materialistic values (Antinienė *et al.*, 2021). This conflict is especially relevant in the context of social responsibility, climate action and sustainable consumption, but its effect on consumer behavior remains under-researched. This internal tension between contemporary value orientations relates directly to the attitude–behavior gap – one of the most persistently documented research object in sustainable consumption research (Zhuo *et al.*, 2022; Fabio *et al.*, 2025). The attitude–behavior gap refers to the inconsistency between consumers' positive attitudes toward green products and their actual purchasing behavior (Zhuo *et al.*, 2022). Although researchers have examined green consumption from various perspectives, the attitude–behavior gap in this context remains insufficiently explored in the existing literature (Zhuo *et al.*, 2022). More recent researchers emphasize the need to examine internal psychological processes (Zíka *et al.*, 2025; Fabio *et al.*, 2025). Despite the existing research on cognitive dissonance as a motivational force for behavior change (Harmon-Jones, 2019; Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin, 2019), its specific role in the context of green and materialistic value conflict remains underexplored. Existing studies have primarily linked such conflict to reduced well-being and increased stress (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Furchheim *et al.*, 2020), without empirically examining whether this conflict also motivates consumers toward behavioral change – a gap that the present study addresses. Existing literature has mainly focused on how value conflicts influence well-being. For example, Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) found that materialistic values and collective-oriented values conflict led to psychological tension and reduced sense of well-being. Furchheim *et al.* (2020) further demonstrated that the green and materialistic value conflict is linked to reduced self-concept clarity and increased stress. Conceptually, value conflict is closely related to cognitive dissonance theory, originally proposed by Festinger (1957). According to this theory, cognitions – defined as elements of knowledge – may be either consonant or dissonant to one another. When cognitions are relevant, they can exist in a state of consonance or dissonance. Festinger (1957) used the term dissonance to describe both the inconsistency between cognitions and the psychological discomfort arising from that inconsistency. The discrepancy between cognitions is now referred to as cognitive

inconsistency or cognitive discrepancy, whereas the resulting psychological discomfort is termed dissonance or dissonance-related discomfort. Dissonance can be reduced through several solutions, including the removal of dissonant cognitions, the addition of new consonant cognitions, the reduction of the perceived importance of dissonant cognitions, or the enhancement of the importance of consonant cognitions (Harmon-Jones, 2019). The literature explains how value conflict affects consumers well-being, the impact on actual consumption behavior remains unexplored. It is still unclear whether materialistic consumers who hold green values are motivated to change their behavior toward more sustainable practices. This uncertainty highlights the attitude–behavior gap, which refers to the discrepancy between individuals' pro-environmental intentions and their actual consumptioven behavior. Zhuo *et al.* (2022) state that while consumers are willing to purchase green products their positive attitude toward green products does not always consistently lead to actual purchases. Attitude–behavior gap describes the misalignment between expressed pro-environmental attitudes and real-life consumption practices. Importantly, this gap is not solely driven by external barriers such as price, availability or time constraints, but may also be sustained by internal psychological processes, including value conflict and psychological discomfort (Zíka *et al.*, 2025). Although researchers have examined green consumption from various aspects, there is still a lack of research on the attitude–behavior gap in the context of green consumption (Zhuo *et al.*, 2022; Zíka *et al.*, 2025). This study aims to fill a research gap by investigating the mediating role of psychological discomfort in the relationship between green–materialistic value conflict and motivation to change consumption behavior. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ1. How does consumers' green and materialistic values conflict affect motivation to change behavior through psychological discomfort?

2. Literature review

2.1 Green and materialistic values

Values provide essential guidelines for making choices and evaluating behavior. As Kaur and Luchs (2022) note, values influence individuals' choices and actions in various aspects. In the context of consumer behavior, values determine the extent to which consumers recognize the impact of their consumption decisions. Values develop throughout life and are not easily changed (Rokeach, 1979; Furchheim *et al.*, 2020). Values that are particularly relevant in contemporary society are green values, which emphasize ecological responsibility, sustainability and choices to minimize the impact of consumption for the environment (Furchheim *et al.*, 2020). It is recognized that materialistic values have also become one of the main consumer values in modern society (Tang and Hinsch, 2018; Furchheim *et al.*, 2020). Furchheim *et al.* (2020) identified a conflict between two important value orientations: green and materialistic values. This conflict arises because green and materialistic values are fundamentally incompatible, corresponding to different principles and behaviors. Green values are related to other values, such as benevolence and universalism. Haws *et al.* (2014) define green values as the tendency to prioritize environmental protection through purchasing and consumption habits. In the environmental domain, consumers who prioritize green values have been associated with various positive environmental outcomes. They demonstrate concern for the environment and natural resources (Halder *et al.*, 2020) and are more likely to reduce consumption and choose for environmentally friendly products (Bangsa and Schlegelmilch, 2020). Lathabhavan and Bharti (2024) found that green values and green attitudes are key determinants of green behavior. According to Richins (2013), materialistic values are closely associated with values such as power, status and hedonism, as they emphasize the acquisition of material possessions as a means of achieving life goals. These values reflect the importance

consumers place on owning and accumulating material objects. Consumers with strong materialistic values tend to believe that material possessions are key sources of wealth, success and happiness. Consequently, such consumers are more likely to engage in higher levels of consumption, driven by the belief that purchasing material goods enhances their overall well-being. According to Dittmar and Isham (2022), materialistic values reflect a person's desire to be wealthy and to own material objects. Dittmar and Isham (2022) argue that consumers with materialistic values seek psychological benefits, particularly greater recognition, higher status and a more attractive image, when purchasing material objects. The behavioral tendencies associated with materialistic values are therefore fundamentally incompatible with green values. According to Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, a conflict of values creates an unpleasant state of psychological discomfort, which in turn leads individuals to adjust their values, beliefs or behavior. This uncomfortable feeling indicates to the individuals that their values or other cognitions are in conflict. To resolve this discomfort, a person needs to change their beliefs or actions. Conducted studies by Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) have shown a conflict between collective and materialistic values and by Furchheim *et al.* (2020) have shown a conflict between green and materialistic values. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) argued that inconsistent beliefs or values lead to an unpleasant psychological state, which can create stress and reduce well-being.

2.2 Value conflict and its impact on psychological discomfort and attitude-behavior gap

Psychological discomfort is one of the main concepts in cognitive dissonance theory. Within this theory, psychological discomfort functions as a positive motivational force that drives individuals to change (Harmon-Jones, 2019). In scientific literature, psychological discomfort is defined as an unpleasant emotional state (Festinger, 1957), dissonance arising from conflicting cognitions (Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin, 2019), and a feeling of unease or anxiety (Elliot and Devine, 1994). According to cognitive dissonance theory, a conflict of values leads to an unpleasant state of psychological discomfort; this discomfort motivates individuals to change their values, beliefs or behaviors. Motivation to change behavior becomes a positive consequence of the conflict between cognitions. Individuals are characterized by consistency between beliefs, values and behaviors. When there is inconsistency between beliefs, values or behaviors, an unpleasant state of discomfort occurs. This uncomfortable state of discomfort is an indicator to individuals that their values or other cognitions are incompatible (Harmon-Jones, 2019). Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002), found that the conflict between collective and materialistic values leads to psychological discomfort which is related to reduced well-being. In their study, Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) identified psychological tension as psychological discomfort. Lee *et al.* (2017) found that continuously promoting social responsibility, when it conflicts with personal values, can result in diminished well-being. Furchheim *et al.* (2020), found that green and materialistic value conflict is related to decreased clarity of self-concept, which is related to increased stress, and stress is linked to decreased subjective well-being.

Attitude-behavior gap in the context of green consumption can be understood as the inconsistency between consumers' positive attitude toward green products and their actual purchasing behavior (Zhuo *et al.*, 2022). Research shows that under the influence of specific contexts and factors, there is a gap between individual's attitudes and behaviors (Zhuo *et al.*, 2022; Hidalgo-Baz *et al.*, 2017). Researchers believe the inconsistency between consumers' positive attitudes and their actual purchasing behavior toward organic products is because of the cognitive conflict between consumer orientations and knowledge (Hidalgo-Baz *et al.*, 2017). However, this explanation, grounded in cognitive dissonance theory, only reflects the conflict between different views in individual consciousness, but does not explain the process through which such conflict unfolds (Zhuo

et al., 2022). The attitude-behavior gap in green consumption reflects the external manifestation of internal contradictions that arise when consumer attitudes are disrupted by situational factors (Zhuo *et al.*, 2022). However, in the context of green and materialistic value conflict specifically, the internal psychological mechanism driving this gap remains underexplored. While external barriers such as price, availability and time constraints have received considerable attention (Zhuo *et al.*, 2022; Fabio *et al.*, 2025), recent scholarship highlights that internal processes – including value conflict and the psychological discomfort it generates – may play an equally important role in sustaining the gap between green attitudes and actual consumption behavior (Zíka *et al.*, 2025; Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin, 2019).

2.3 The relationship between psychological discomfort and motivation to change

The gap between attitudes and behaviors is recognized as a core issue in the decision-making process underlying the adoption of sustainable and/or ethical behaviors in food consumption contexts (Verbeke and Vackier, 2005). Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin (2019) stated that psychological discomfort acts as a strong mediator between the attitude–behavior gap and the resulting motivation to change one's behavior, as individuals confronted with a conflict between their habitual or past behaviors and contradictory attitudes tend to reduce this discomfort by modifying at least one of the dissonant cognitions, either by downplaying the new attitude or by adjusting their actual behavior. Despite its relevance, this perspective remains underexplored in the context of green and materialistic value conflict. Vieira *et al.* (2023) identified several psychological barriers that help explain the gap between environmental attitudes and actual behaviors, including perceptions that behavioral change is unnecessary, the presence of conflicting goals, the influence of interpersonal relationships, insufficient knowledge and tokenistic actions. According to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), psychological discomfort motivates individuals to change their values, reorient their priorities, or alter their behavior. According to Grodin *et al.* (2019), motivation to change behavior is defined as the tendency of an individual to engage in a behavior change strategy. Séré de Lanauze, G. and Siadou-Martin (2019) found that psychological discomfort motivates consumers to change their behavior and reduce consumption in the meat consumption context. Psychological discomfort increases the need to alleviate discomfort, which leads to the motivation to change behavior. However, the relationship between values conflict, psychological discomfort, and motivation to change behavior remains unexplored. Based on cognitive dissonance theory, it can be predicted that the consumers' green and materialistic value conflict induces psychological discomfort, which may be linked to the motivation to change behavior.

2.4 Current study

In the context of the arguments presented above, this study aims to address a gap in the existing literature by examining how internal value conflict impacts motivation to change consumption behavior. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) has identify that conflict between incompatible value orientations – such as materialistic and collective values – are associated with psychological discomfort. Similarly, studies grounded in cognitive dissonance theory have demonstrated that psychological discomfort arising from conflicting cognitions can motivate individuals to change their behavior (Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin, 2019). However, these relationships have rarely been examined in the specific context of green and materialistic value conflict. Importantly, although green and materialistic values represent two dominant and fundamentally incompatible value orientations in contemporary consumer culture, the psychological mechanism through which conflict influences motivation to change consumption behavior remains underexplored. This study examines psychological discomfort as a mediating mechanism

linking green and materialistic value conflict to motivation to change consumption behavior. While the relationships between value conflict and psychological discomfort, and between psychological discomfort and motivation to change behavior, have been examined in prior research, this study aims to test these relationships within the context of green and materialistic value conflict. The study advances understanding of the internal psychological processes underlying the attitude–behavior gap in sustainable consumption. Based on this reasoning, three hypotheses are proposed. First, consistent with cognitive dissonance theory and prior research on incompatible value systems (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002), it is hypothesized that green and materialistic value conflict has a positive effect on psychological discomfort. Consumers who simultaneously hold green and materialistic values are expected to experience discomfort due to the inconsistency between these cognitions. Second, drawing on cognitive dissonance theory and empirical findings by Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin (2019), it is hypothesized that psychological discomfort positively influences motivation to change consumption behavior, as individuals seek to reduce this unpleasant emotional state. Psychological discomfort is inherently aversive, and individuals are therefore motivated to change their behavior to change this state. Third, this study hypothesizes that green and materialistic value conflict influences motivation to change consumption behavior indirectly through psychological discomfort, positioning discomfort as an essential mechanism in the behavior change process. Change occurs when the current situation is perceived as unpleasant, including when it is psychologically uncomfortable Figure 1.

On the basis of the literature review summarized above, the following hypotheses are raised:

H1. Green and materialistic value conflict has a positive effect on psychological discomfort.

H2. Psychological discomfort has a positive effect on motivation to change behavior.

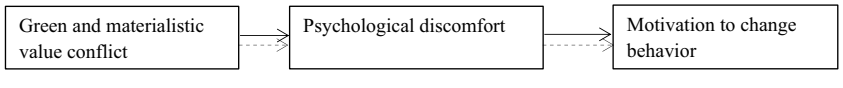
H3. Green and materialistic value conflict positively affects motivation to change behavior through mediator psychological discomfort.

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and procedures

A quantitative research approach was used to empirically examine the relationships between green–materialistic conflict, psychological discomfort and motivation to change behavior. This approach was considered appropriate as the study aimed to test hypothesized relationships between variables. Data were collected using an online, self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on previously validated measurement scales, pre-tested to ensure clarity and reliability, and then administered digitally. The survey was distributed to a representative sample of the Lithuanian population aged 18–65 using a stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was applied based on age and gender to enhance sample representativeness and reduce sampling error. Data collection was conducted by a professional research agency during July–August 2023. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and all responses were collected in accordance with ethical research principles. In total, 600

Figure 1 Conceptual model



Source: Authors' own work

respondents participated in the study. Of these, 47.5% were male, 52.0% were female and 0.5% identified as other. The age distribution was as follows: 18–24 years (11%), 25–34 years (20.2%), 35–44 years (20.8%), 45–54 years (22.8%) and 55–65 years (25.2%). Most respondents ($n = 297$) held a university degree.

3.2 Measures

Based on the research design, the research instrument Table 1 was developed as a questionnaire consisting of four questions to assess the constructs and four socio-demographic questions. To control possible bias in the general approach, measurements of the different variables were collected from different sources. The questionnaire included socio-demographic questions on age, gender, education and financial situation. *Green Values*. The respondents' level of green values was measured with the green consumption values scale (Haws *et al.*, 2014). Participants responded to six statements (e.g. "I would describe myself as environmentally responsible") using a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). *Materialistic Values*. The respondents' level of materialistic values was measured with the materialistic values scale (Richins, 2004). Participants responded to nine statements (e.g. "Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure") using a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). *Psychological discomfort*. Psychological discomfort was measured with three statements (e.g. "Sometimes I feel guilty about buying too much"), adapted from the four-statement scale used in Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin's (2019) research. Participants indicated their answers on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). *Motivation to change behavior*. Motivation to change behavior was measured with three statements (e.g. "I am willing to reduce my consumption") adapted from Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin (2019) research. Participants indicated their answers on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Table 1 Research instrument

Construct	*Items*	*Authors*
Materialistic values	1. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes 2. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure 3. My life would be happier if I owned certain things I don't have 4. The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life 5. I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned. (reversed) 6. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things 7. I like to own things that impress people 8. I like a lot of luxury in my life 9. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things that I'd like	Richins (2004)
Green values	1. It is important to me that the products I use do not harm the environment 2. I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions 3. My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment 4. I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet 5. I would describe myself as environmentally responsible 6. I am willing to be inconvenient to take actions that are environmentally friendly	Haws *et al.* (2014)
Psychological discomfort	1. Sometimes I feel guilty about buying too much 2. When I know I am buying products that are not environmentally friendly, I feel uncomfortable 3. Psychologically, I am disturbed by the fact that I consume too much 4. Consumption causes me some anxiety	Adapted from Séré by Lanauze and Siadou-Martin (2019)
Motivation to change behavior	1. I think I should reduce my consumption 2. I'm going to buy less things 3. I am willing to reduce my consumption	Adapted from Séré by Lanauze and Siadou-Martin (2019)

Source(s): Authors' own work

3.3 Data analysis

Before the analysis, the reverse statements of the scales were recoded. After recoding, the green and materialistic value conflict was calculated using the Furchheim *et al.* (2020) formula: Value conflict = (green values + materialistic values)/2 − ABS (green values − materialistic values). Multivariate outliers were detected using the Mahalanobis distance test, which detected one multivariate outlier. This outlier was removed from the data set before further analysis. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's one-factor test through factor analysis. The results indicated no presence of common method bias, as a single factor explained 27.39% of the variance, which is below the 50% threshold. According to Kock *et al.* (2021), a bias is considered to exist if single factor accounts for more than 50% of the variance. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify latent factors and indicators. The Maximum Likelihood method with Oblimin rotation was selected to analyze the factor structure and the relationships between the scale items, as this method accounts for expected correlations between variables. The Maximum Likelihood method was chosen due to the normal distribution of the variables. Fabrigar *et al.* (1999) argue that when the data are relatively normally distributed, the maximum likelihood method is the optimal choice, as it allows the calculation of model fit indices, the statistical testing of factor loadings and correlations and the evaluation of confidence intervals. According to Fabrigar *et al.* (1999), this approach is particularly useful when researchers aim to assess the model's goodness of fit. It also allows the number of factors to be determined before the analysis and tests whether the specified number of factors adequately explains the variance in the data. In this analysis, different variables corresponded to distinct factors, and several items that were loaded onto multiple factors were removed. Specifically, Items 1, 2, 4 and 5 from the materialistic values construct, as well as Items 2 and 4 from the psychological discomfort construct, were eliminated Table 2.

The results of the factor analysis showed that the KMO criterion was 0.866, and Bartlett's sphericity test was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). As expected, the factor analysis identified four factors explaining 72.04% of the variance, with individual components accounting for 33.85, 19.34, 13.62 and 5.22% of the variance. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the survey instrument, with an acceptable threshold of > 0.7 (Shrestha, 2021). The Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs of green values, materialistic values, psychological discomfort and motivation to change behavior ranged from 0.80 to 0.92, confirming the instrument's reliability. According to Shrestha (2021), convergent validity is determined when the average variance extracted (AVE) is ≥ 0.5. AVE values for green values, materialistic values, psychological discomfort and motivation to change behavior ranged from 0.50 to 0.64, supporting convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In addition, Shrestha (2021) states that composite reliability (CR) should exceed 0.7. The CR values for these factors ranged from 0.74 to 0.92, indicating strong internal consistency. Together, AVE values ≥ 0.5 and CR values > 0.7 confirm the convergent validity of the constructs (Table 3).

Discriminant validity was validated because the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct was higher than its total variance with any other construct. As expected, value conflict has a positive correlation with green values, materialistic values, psychological

Table 2 Exploratory factor analysis results

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.866
Bartlett test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5552.509
	df	120
	Sig.	<0.001

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3 Values of Cronbach's alpha, AVE and CR

Construct	*N (of items)*	*Items*	*Factor loadings*	*Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)*	*AVE*	*CR*	*Factor loadings*
Component 1: Green values	6	Q2r1	0.80	0.92	0.64	0.92	0.76–0.87
		Q2r2	0.87				
		Q2r3	0.85				
		Q2r4	0.77				
		Q2r5	0.76				
		Q2r6	0.76				
Component 2: Motivation to change behavior	3	Q4r1	0.52	0.89	0.63	0.83	0.52–0.92
		Q4r2	0.88				
		Q4r3	0.92				
Component 3: Materialistic values	5	Q1r3	0.79	0.83	0.50	0.77	0.55–0.84
		Q1r6	0.84				
		Q1r7	0.58				
		Q1r8	0.55				
		Q1r9	0.70				
Component 4: Psychological discomfort	2	Q3r1	0.78	0.80	0.59	0.74	0.76–0.78
		Q3r3					

Source(s): Authors' own work

discomfort and motivation to change behavior. The correlation analysis further revealed that green values have a positive correlation with both variables psychological discomfort and motivation to change behavior. Materialistic values showed a positive and significant correlation with psychological discomfort but not with motivation to change behavior. In addition, psychological discomfort was positively correlated with motivation to change behavior (Table 4).

4. Results

Multicollinearity was tested before the main analysis and was not detected, as the variance inflation factor (VIF) did not exceed 10. To test the hypotheses related to the mediator, Model 84 of Hayes' (2022) PROCESS macro with 5,000 bootstrapped samples was used. Data analysis revealed that materialistic and green values conflict had a positive impact on psychological discomfort (b = 0.218, $p = 0.000$). Psychological discomfort was also found to have a positive influence on motivation to change behavior (b = 0.577, $p = 0.000$). However, when controlling for the mediator effect, the conflict between materialistic and green values did not have a direct impact on motivation to change behavior (b = –0.042, $p = 0.118$). The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect (0.081–0.173) did not include zero, indicating that the impact of green and materialistic value conflict on motivation to change behavior through the mediator, psychological discomfort, was statistically significant (Table 5). These results suggest that green and materialistic value conflict significantly influences motivation to change behavior through psychological discomfort. The total effect indicators further confirm that this conflict has a statistically significant effect on motivation to change behavior ($p = 0.011$).

Table 4 Mean, standard deviation and correlation of the variables

Variable	*Mean (M)*	*SD*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
1.Green values	4.76	1.12	1				
2. Materialistic values	3.66	1.24	0.003	1			
3. Psychological discomfort	3.71	1.41	0.284**	0.219**	1		
4. Motivation to change behavior	4.15	1.30	0.417**	–0.011	0.614**	1	
5. Values conflict	2.62	1.61	0.106**	0.821**	0.250**	0.104*	1

Note(s): **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)
Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 5 The main results of data analysis

Variables	*Estimate*	*SE*	*T*	p	*95,0% CI lower*	*higher*
Direct effect a path Values conflict → psychological discomfort	0.218	0.035	6.306	0.000	0.150	0.286
Direct effect b path Psychological discomfort → motivation to change behavior	0.577	0.031	18.795	0.000	0.517	0.637
Direct effect c' path Values conflict → motivation to change behavior	–0.042	0.027	–1.567	0.118	–0.095	0.011
Total effect c path Values conflict → motivation to change behavior	0.084	0.033	2.563	0.011	0.148	0.104
Indirect effect Values conflict → motivation to change behavior	0.126	0.023			0.081	1.173

Source(s): Authors' own work

The analysis confirmed the hypotheses:

H1. Green and materialistic value conflict has a positive effect on psychological discomfort.

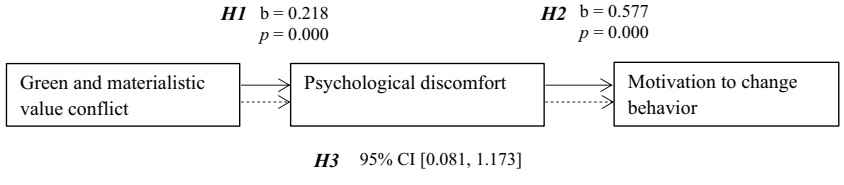
H2. Psychological discomfort has a positive effect on motivation to change behavior.

H3. Green and materialistic value conflict positively affects motivation to change behavior through mediator psychological discomfort.

The data analysis confirmed all the proposed hypotheses. The results showed that the conflict between consumers' green and materialistic values positively affects psychological discomfort. This aligns with cognitive dissonance theory, which states that psychological discomfort arises from a conflict between cognitions, creating an uncomfortable emotional state. These findings are consistent with earlier research conducted in a different value conflict context by Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002), who demonstrated that psychological discomfort is positively influenced by conflicts between materialistic and collective values. In addition, the results showed that psychological discomfort positively impacts motivation to change behavior, suggesting that discomfort motivates consumers to alter their behavior. This aligns with cognitive dissonance theory, which asserts that discomfort drives individuals to change their values, beliefs, or behavior. These results are also consistent with the findings of Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin (2019), who demonstrated that psychological discomfort fosters motivation to change behavior in the context of meat consumption. The results revealed that the effect of the green and materialistic value conflict on motivation to change behavior, mediated by psychological discomfort, is statistically significant and positive Figure 2.

In summary, the research findings confirmed all the hypotheses, demonstrating that green and materialistic value conflict positively affects psychological discomfort. Psychological

Figure 2 Research results



Source: Authors' own work

discomfort, in turn, positively influences motivation to change behavior. In addition, the consumers' green and materialistic value conflict has a positive effect on motivation to change behavior through the mediating role of psychological discomfort.

5. Discussion

This study deepens understanding of sustainable consumption by explicitly examining how internal value conflict between green and materialistic values affects motivation to change consumption behavior through psychological discomfort. Anchored in cognitive dissonance theory, the findings clarify an important internal psychological mechanism underlying the attitude–behavior gap in sustainability contexts (Verbeke and Vackier, 2005). Consistent with Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, the results indicate that green and materialistic value conflict significantly increases psychological discomfort. This finding corroborates earlier studies showing that incompatible value systems generate psychological tension (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Furchheim *et al.*, 2020; Zíka *et al.*, 2025). However, while previous research (Furchheim *et al.*, 2020) has primarily linked such value conflict to diminished well-being, stress, or reduced self-concept clarity, the present study extends these insights by demonstrating that value conflict also plays a motivational role, encouraging consumers to reconsider their consumption behavior. The positive relationship between psychological discomfort and motivation to change behavior aligns with prior findings in food consumption contexts (Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin, 2019) and supports the core assumption of cognitive dissonance theory that discomfort functions as a motivating force for behavioral adjustment. Importantly, the findings show that psychological discomfort fully mediates the relationship between green and materialistic value conflict and motivation to change behavior. This result advances existing conceptualizations of the attitude–behavior gap by demonstrating that value conflict alone is insufficient to drive motivation unless it is emotionally experienced as psychological discomfort. In contrast to studies emphasizing external barriers or general psychological obstacles (Vieira *et al.*, 2023), the present findings highlight internal emotional processes as central drivers of behavioral motivation. Overall, by integrating value conflict, psychological discomfort and motivation to change into a research model, this study extends cognitive dissonance theory and contributes to sustainability research by providing a more nuanced understanding of the internal mechanisms that motivate consumers to reduce consumption.

5.1 Theoretical contribution and managerial implications

The present study investigated the relationship between green and materialistic values conflict, psychological discomfort and motivation to change behavior through a cognitive dissonance approach. In line with previous literature that suggests discrepancies between attitudes and purchase behaviors toward green products (Hidalgo-Baz and Martos-Partal, 2017; Zhuo *et al.*, 2022) we find that consumers who simultaneously hold green and materialistic values experience psychological discomfort arising from this internal value conflict, which in turn motivates them to change their consumption behavior. This inconsistency reflects cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), which posits that conflicting cognitions generate an unpleasant emotional state that drives individuals to restore consistency (Harmon-Jones, 2019). The findings extend cognitive dissonance theory by empirically validating psychological discomfort as a mediating mechanism linking green and materialistic value conflict to motivation to change consumption behavior. While previous research (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Furchheim *et al.*, 2020; Hidalgo-Baz and Martos-Partal, 2017; Zhuo *et al.*, 2022) has acknowledged the existence of value conflict and the attitude–behavior gap, the present study demonstrates that value conflict becomes behaviorally meaningful when it induces psychological discomfort – thereby clarifying the process through which cognitive conflict translates into motivation to change, a process that Zhuo *et al.* (2022) identified as underexplored in the green consumption

literature. Importantly, whereas Furchheim *et al.* (2020) primarily linked green–materialistic value conflict to diminished well-being and reduced self-concept clarity, the present findings extend their work by showing that such conflict also carries a positive motivational consequence. The present study contributes by extending this mechanism to the specific domain of green and materialistic value conflict, demonstrating that discomfort arising from competing value orientations – rather than from attitude–behavior inconsistency alone – can drive motivation to reduce consumption. The proposed conceptual model contributes to the sustainability literature by offering a theoretically grounded framework that integrates value conflict, emotional response and behavioral motivation. By linking green–materialistic value conflict to motivation to change behavior through psychological discomfort, this study addresses the need identified by Zhuo *et al.* (2022) and Zíka *et al.* (2025) to examine internal psychological processes. This model provides a foundation for future research exploring internal psychological mechanisms across different consumption domains and cultural contexts.

From a management and policy perspective, the results of the study show that the conflict between green and materialistic values can be used as a trigger to encourage sustainable behavioral change. Organizations and policymakers should move beyond purely informational campaigns and address the emotional and identity-related processes involved in consumer decision-making. First, sustainability communication strategies should be designed to gently highlight inconsistencies between consumers' environmental values and materialistic consumption patterns, thereby activating psychological discomfort in a constructive manner that encourages reflection and motivation to change. Second, marketing strategies targeting materialistic consumers should emphasize the compatibility of sustainable consumption with personal satisfaction, success and self-identity. Framing sustainability as a source of well-being rather than as a sacrifice may help consumers resolve internal value conflict without resistance. Finally, organizations should provide clear, consistent decision-making cues aligned with green values across consumption contexts. Reducing ambiguity and reinforcing value coherence can help consumers alleviate psychological discomfort in ways that support long-term behavioral change rather than short-term rationalization.

5.2 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the study was carried out in one country, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other countries. Future research could explore how the impact of the conflict between green and materialist values differs in different societies. Such research would provide a more detailed understanding of the cultural factors that determine consumer responses to internal value conflicts and their impact on sustainability. Second, the continuity of behavioral changes over time has not been investigated. Future research could use survey methods to assess whether the motivation for behavioral change caused by value conflicts persists over time. Investigating the persistence of these motivations would provide a better understanding of the potential long-term effects on consumption behavior.

6. Conclusions

In the context of climate change, this study shows that the conflict between green and materialistic values can have a positive impact on consumer behavior. The conflict between materialistic and green values increases psychological discomfort, which in turn strengthens motivation to choose more sustainable behavior. In this context, psychological discomfort is a positive phenomenon that increases motivation to change. These findings contribute to environmental psychology and social responsibility by providing new insights into the psychological processes underlying environmentally friendly behavior and by extending the theoretical scope of cognitive dissonance theory. From a practical point of

view, these results can be useful for policy and marketing strategies aimed at reducing overconsumption and promoting sustainability. Understanding the internal tensions that consumers face can lead to more effective behavior change campaigns. Campaigns aimed at reducing materialistic tendencies should focus on empowering consumers to positively integrate sustainability into their self-concept. To be effective, these campaigns should emphasize the compatibility between sustainable living and personal satisfaction, rather than portraying them as mutually contradictory.

References

Antinienė, D., Šeinauskienė, B., Rutelione, A., Nikou, S. and Lekavičienė, R. (2021), "Do demographics matter in consumer materialism?", *Engineering Economics*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 296-312.

Bangsa, A.B. and Schlegelmilch, B.B. (2020), "Linking sustainable product attributes and consumer decision-making: insights from a systematic review", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 245, p. 118902.

Burroughs, J.E. and Rindfleisch, A. (2002), "Materialism and well-being: a conflicting values perspective", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 348-370.

Dholakia, U., Jung, J. and Chowdhry, N. (2018), "Should I buy this when I have so much? Reflection on personal possessions as an anticonsumption strategy", *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 260-273.

Dittmar, H. and Isham, A. (2022), "Materialistic value orientation and wellbeing", *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Vol. 46, p. 101337.

Elliot, A.J. and Devine, P.G. (1994), "On the motivational nature of cognitive dissonance: dissonance as psychological discomfort", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 67 No. 3, pp. 382-394.

Eurobarometer (2023), "Attitudes of europeans towards the environment", available at: https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3173

European Environment Agency (2024), "Consumption of clothing, footwear and other textiles in the EU reaches new record high", available at: www.eea.europa.eu/en/newsroom/news/consumption-of-clothing-footwear-other-textiles-in-the-eu-reaches-new-record-high

Fabio, R.A., Croce, A. and Calabrese, C. (2025), "Bridging the green attitude–behavior gap", *Journal of Sustainability Research*, Vol. 7 No. 3.

Fabrigar, L.R., Wegener, D.T., MacCallum, R.C. and Strahan, E.J. (1999), "Evaluating the use of exploratory factor analysis in psychological research", *Psychological Methods*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 272-299.

Faelli, F. (2023), "Consumers say their environmental concerns are increasing due to extreme weather; study shows they're willing to change behavior, pay 12% more for sustainable products", *Bain & Company*, available at: www.bain.com/about/media-center/press-releases/2023/consumers-say-their-environmental-concerns-are-increasing-due-to-extreme-weather-study-shows-theyre-willing-to-change-behavior-pay-12-more-for-sustainable-products/

Festinger, L. (1957), *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F. (1981), "Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 39-50.

Furchheim, P., Martin, C. and Morhart, F. (2020), "Being green in a materialistic world: consequences for subjective well-being", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 114-130.

Grodin, E.N., Lim, A.C., MacKillop, J., Karno, M.P. and Ray, L.A. (2019), "An examination of motivation to change and neural alcohol cue reactivity following a brief intervention", *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, Vol. 10, p. 408.

Halder, P., Hansen, E.N., Kangas, J. and Laukkanen, T. (2020), "How national culture and ethics matter in consumers' green consumption values", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 265, p. 121754.

Harmon-Jones, E. (2019), *Cognitive Dissonance: Re-Examining a Pivotal Theory in Psychology*, 2nd ed., American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Haws, K.L., Winterich, K.P. and Naylor, R.W. (2014), "Seeing the world through green-tinted glasses: green consumption values and responses to environmentally friendly products", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 336-354.

Hidalgo-Baz, M., Martos-Partal, M. and González-Benito, Ó. (2017), "Attitudes vs. purchase behaviors as experienced dissonance: the roles of knowledge and consumer orientations in organic market", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 8, p. 248.

Hogg, T.L., Stanley, S.K., O'Brien, L.V., Watsford, C.R. and Walker, I. (2024), "Clarifying the nature of the association between eco-anxiety, wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol. 95, p. 102249.

Hurst, M., Dittmar, H., Bond, R. and Kasser, T. (2013), "The relationship between materialistic values and environmental attitudes and behaviors: a meta-analysis", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol. 36, pp. 257-269.

Kasser, T. (2017), "Living both well and sustainably: a review of the literature, with some reflections on future research, interventions and policy", *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, Vol. 375 No. 2095, p. 20160369.

Kasser, T. (2018), "Materialism and living well", in *Handbook of Well-Being*, DEF Publishers, Salt Lake City, UT.

Kaur, T. and Luchs, M.G. (2022), "Mindfulness enhances the values that promote sustainable consumption", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 990-1006.

Kock, F., Berbekova, A. and Assaf, A.G. (2021), "Understanding and managing the threat of common method bias: detection, prevention and control", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 86, p. 104330.

Lathabhavan, R. and Bharti, T. (2024), "Exploring the linkage of green values and green attitude in green behaviour: moderating role of green climate among indian employees", *Social Responsibility Journal*, Vol. 20 No. 10, pp. 2008-2024.

Lee, J.M., Kim, H.J. and Rha, J.Y. (2017), "*Shopping for Society? consumers' Value Conflicts in Socially Responsible Consumption Affected by Retail Regulation'', Sustainability*, Vol. 9 No. 11, p. 1968.

Liobikienė, G., Liobikas, J., Brizga, J. and Juknys, R. (2020), "Materialistic values impact on pro-environmental behavior: the case of transition country as Lithuania", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 244, p. 118859.

Ogiemwonyi, O., Alam, M.N., Alshareef, R., Alsolamy, M., Azizan, N.A. and Mat, N. (2023), "Environmental factors affecting green purchase behaviors of the consumers: mediating role of environmental attitude", *Cleaner Environmental Systems*, Vol. 10, p. 100130.

Plechatá, A., Morton, T. and Makransky, G. (2025), "Promoting collective climate action and identification with environmentalists through social interaction and visual feedback in virtual reality", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol. 102.

Richins, M.L. (2004), "The material values scale: measurement properties and development of a short form", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 209-219.

Richins, M.L. (2011), "Materialism, transformation expectations, and spending: implications for credit use", *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 141-156.

Richins, M.L. (2013), "When wanting is better than having: materialism, transformation expectations, and product-evoked emotions in the purchase process", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 40 No. 1, pp. 1-18.

Rokeach, M. (1979), "Some unresolved issues in theories of beliefs, attitudes, and values", in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE.

Séré de Lanauze, G. and Siadou-Martin, B. (2019), "Dissonant cognitions: from psychological discomfort to motivation to change", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 36 No. 5, pp. 565-581.

Shrestha, N. (2021), "Factor analysis as a tool for survey analysis", *American Journal of Applied Mathematics and Statistics*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 4-11.

Tang, Y. and Hinsch, C. (2018), "Going green to be morally clean: an examination of environmental behavior among materialistic consumers", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 35 No. 11, pp. 845-862.

Verbeke, W. and Vackier, I. (2005), "Individual determinants of fish consumption: application of the theory of planned behaviour", *Appetite*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 67-82.

Vieira, J., Castro, S.L. and Souza, A.S. (2023), "Psychological barriers moderate the attitude–behavior gap for climate change", *PLOS One*, Vol. 18 No. 7, p. e0287404.

Yadav, M. and Dahiya, S. (2025), "Can green finance and innovations promote environmental sustainability: empirical evidence from India", *Social Responsibility Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 6.

Zhuo, Z., Ren, Z. and Zhu, Z. (2022), "Attitude-behavior gap in green consumption behavior: a review", *Journal of Economics, Management and Trade*, Vol. 28 No. 12, pp. 12-28.

Zíka, V., Olšová, P. and Jánská, M. (2025), "The attitude–behavior gap is not one-sided: some do more for the environment than they believe", *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics, in Press*, Vol. 119.

Corresponding author

Rita Markauskaitė can be contacted at: rita.markauskaite@ktu.lt