

Stressful sustainability: a hermeneutic analysis

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Abstract-

Purpose

Research on sustainable consumption (SC) has shown how, faced with barriers that prevent them from embracing a sustainable lifestyle, consumers experience classic symptoms of distress. Although distress emerges as a constitutive dimension of sustainable lifestyles, research has not yet provided a comprehensive account of how consumers cope with it. This paper aims to provide such an account.

Design/methodology/approach

In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 people who defined themselves as sustainable consumers. A hermeneutic approach was adopted for the analysis.

Findings

The analysis shows that consumers enact two different coping strategies: adjustment or episodic coping and structural coping or deradicalization. Both sets encompass reappraisals and meaning-making strategies to maintain motivation while simultaneously appeasing tensions. They also comprise the strategic enactment of emotions to energize the self and/or to appease distress. Coping influences how SC is appraised and lived, as these practices are dynamically changed to navigate structural constraints.

Practical implications

SC campaigns have traditionally focused on cognitive empowerment. However, the evidence suggests that emotional empowerment could be a more effective way to promote the practice.

Originality/value

This paper provides the first in-depth examination of the strategies adopted to cope with distress. The analysis shows that consumers reconfigure how SC is

appraised and implemented, while emphasizing the crucial role of emotion work in the coping repertoire. Although SC is stressful due to structural and social constraints, consumers are able to remain committed to it to varying degrees.

Index Terms- sustainable consumption, stress, hermeneutic, emotion work, hypergood, deradicalization, coping.

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