

# An Emerging Trend of Mindful Consumption: Why People Don't Walk Their Talk?

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When you come across people who do not act ethically as consumers, do you wonder how they could be indifferent towards others and the environment? If yes, you may be asking the wrong question. Research has shown that in many cases, people have the best intention to behave ethically and pro-environmentally; what is missing is the conversion of their intention into actual behaviour (Bamberg & Möser, 2007; [Grimmer & Miles, 2017](#); [Richetin et al., 2011](#)).

Take meat consumption, for instance. The main reasons that people avoid eating meat include standing against animal cruelty and preserving environmental resources (Bamberg & Möser, 2007; [Sheth et al., 2011](#)). However, it seems unlikely that others who eat meat want to be cruel to animals or harm the environment. Instead, the chances are that there is a gap between their intention and their actual behaviour. This intention-behaviour gap (IBG) is a well-known phenomenon that has been studied for decades within various fields, including social psychology, business and marketing (Bamberg & Möser, 2007; [Loy et al., 2016](#); Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

## Intention-Behaviour Gap and Mindful Consumption

One area in which IBG might contribute to better global outcomes is in mindful consumption, where we are consciously aware of our thoughts, intentions and behaviours regarding our consumption ([Sheth et al., 2011](#)). People's sustainable behaviours towards their environment are at the core of mindful consumption ([Sachdeva et al., 2009](#); [Sheth et al., 2011](#)). Research shows that an increasing number of consumers pay attention to the ethical aspects of the products ([Djafarova & Foots, 2022](#); [Imtiyaz et al., 2021](#); [Oe & Yamaoka, 2022](#)). Also, there has been significant growth in marketing research in the field of sustainable and mindful consumption, especially since 2015 (Haider et al., 2022).

At first glance, mindful consumption may appear against humans' evolutionary urges towards prioritising personal interests over collective rewards ([Sörqvist & Langeborg, 2019](#)). However, because of the importance of social exchange in humans' survival, natural selection has shaped our cognition to seek balance in our social interactions and, more broadly, in our environmental transactions ([Sörqvist & Langeborg,](#)

2019). Hence, in mindful consumption, people consciously care about themselves, their community and nature (Lim, 2017; [Sheth et al., 2011](#)). Behaviour and intention are two critical parts of mindful consumption (Jai-Ok et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2008). Therefore, IBG can directly affect the degree to which people behave mindfully as consumers.

In order to confirm that IBG is a real issue in the mindful consumption context, [Davies et al. \(2002\)](#) ran a study in which they looked at the relationship between consumers' intention and behaviour regarding kerbside recycling. They tested several models of behaviour prediction with particular attention to the link between the participants' cognition and behaviour. The study concluded that the intention was not a good predictor of the actual behaviour, at least in the context of environmentally conscious waste management.

One explanation for IBG could be the fact that the goals underlying the contradictory behaviours are not necessarily the opposite of each other ([Richetin et al., 2011](#)). Going back to our meat-eating example, although a typical goal for avoiding meat may be reducing animal cruelty, a typical goal one pursues by eating meat could be to enjoy a delicious meal. The two goals can be very different or even partly contradictory, yet they are not simple opposites of each other. [Richetin et al. \(2011\)](#) tested this on 224 non-vegetarian adults over 14 days. They concluded that both the intention to eat meat and the intention not to eat meat could independently predict the occurrence of the participants' actions (i.e., eating meat or not). Hence, the IBG can be explained based on the coexistence of two different – but not opposing – intentions.

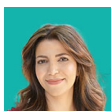
### How to Reduce the Intention–Behaviour Gap

Several tools and techniques have been proposed to help with IBG reduction. A practical and easy-to-implement technique to narrow the IBG is to form if-then plans ([Sheeran & Webb, 2016](#)). For instance, an if-then plan for the meat-eating example could be something like: if I go to a grocery store, then I will skip the meat section. This technique is self-regulatory and easy to implement, and its effectiveness has been confirmed in many studies and various contexts ([Loy et al., 2016](#); [Spring et al., 2020](#)).

In a five-week experiment by [Loy et al. \(2016\)](#), the if-then technique proved to be effective in reducing meat consumption. The participants were randomly divided into two groups: (1) a group in which the participants received some information on the benefits of reducing meat consumption and also instructions on utilising the if-then technique, (2) a group in which the participants only received the same information on the benefits of reducing meat consumption. The study results showed that the first group converted their intentions to the actual behaviour of reducing their meat consumption more effectively. While receiving information has been shown to be crucial for mindful consumption (Burke et al., 2014; [Frank & Brock, 2018](#)), the if-then technique can make a further difference when trying to narrow the IBG.

We have used meat consumption as an example in this article because consuming less meat is one of the determinants of mindful and sustainable food consumption ([Loy et al., 2016](#)). Plant-based products require less fuel, water, and land than meat products ([Sörqvist & Langeborg, 2019](#)). Moreover, meat-free products produce less pollution and greenhouse gas emissions ([Sörqvist & Langeborg, 2019](#)).

Nonetheless, the arguments provided in this article can be similarly applied to other mindful consumption behaviours, such as recycling and non-degradable waste reduction, and even more generally to any behaviour change scenarios ([Sheeran & Webb, 2016](#)). Therefore, the next time you decide to be a more mindful consumer – or change any other behaviour – keep in mind that deciding to do so is far from enough; you may need to utilise techniques like the if-then planning to ensure your intentions will efficiently translate into tangible behaviours.



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