

# THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL: YOUNG PEOPLE ECO-AWARENESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ILLUSION OF EXPLANATORY DEPTH

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## **Abstract**

The European Green Deal is the largest economic correction in the history of the EU. Professionals and experts speak about this project during conferences, international meetings, in media and through other channels of communication, but how many people who are not closely related to the field of economics, innovation and science understand the importance of this project? How high is the level of awareness associated with this issue among the other audience – among the active players of this game aimed at improving the environment? A huge number of professionals in the industry are working to find solutions and paths to achieve the Green Deal goals, and, of course, all the scientific representatives who is interlinked with this area strongly support the ideas. But what about young people who are not in the industry – the generation whose role it is to turn ideas into reality? How important and influential is consumer awareness in the context of the European Green Deal course? In order to analyse this issue, the authors consider it important to reveal the topic of the relevance of the problem, consumer behaviour and sustainable mindset from not a strict scientific perspective and paradigm, but from a popular-scientific way. To delve into the study in more detail, the article describes the analysis of the hypothesis of the prism of awareness through the illusion of explanatory depth for young people, who are potential consumers, as well as the engines of the propagation of the movement. . Competent dissemination of information and a positive impact on the young segment in order to increase the level of awareness of environmental aspects is considered to be very important right now, but to what extent are young people, creators of change, are aware of it right now?

**Keywords:** the European Green Deal, the illusion of explanatory depth, greenwashing, awareness, sustainability.

## **Introduction**

The modern world is full of information that is available from completely different channels. A couple of decades ago, to get this or that information, it was worth making more effort than just writing a query on Google. But besides the fact that it was more difficult to request and receive information on a particular topic, the filter for this very information was also much larger. Today, during targeted advertising, which is not always set up by professionals, the Internet issues millions of signs a day on topics that the reader may

never have been interested in – one did not ask for it, did not choose it. This can lead to information fatigue<sup>1</sup> – when one does not feel like reading at night or watching TV, because there is simply too much information. Also, the so-called information boom, the authors believe, gives way to the development of such a phenomenon as the illusion of explanatory depth<sup>2</sup>.

An example is considered to make it comprehensible: with help of target advertising, a person gets an article on the topic of how the kettle works. The so-called lead clicks on the link, reads this article, without checking the authenticity and relevance, as well as the source at all. After reading, the lead tends to think that now he or she has more knowledge about the operation of teapots, but technically, any of the people who does not understand teapots can write such an article and publish it on a well-packaged platform<sup>3</sup>. What does this mean and how does it interlink with the topic? Promoting a 'sustainable lifestyle' is one of the hottest topics of our time – a bunch of brands make PR campaigns on it, influencers are making money, and there is information about global issues and campaigns for sorting waste, using less water and cutting down on meat more than ever before. But authors became curious about the following – what is the level of green-awareness of your people? Hence, the perspective of the illusion of explanatory depth was chosen to conduct empirical research on this matter to check the hypothesis whether even with this amount of accessible information and this topic being so hot literally and figuratively, do representatives of the young generation know about the problems that the European Green Deal aims to solve, and is their consumer behaviour influenced by it?

Goals of the European Green Deal are specific and detailed. But an important element in achieving the goals of the project is considered to be the dissemination of information and any popularization of the topic<sup>4</sup> – not only among politicians, sociologists, economists and professionals in areas closely related to the European Green Deal, but also among the younger generation, whose levers of influence are non-scientific conferences and published pacts, and the Internet, social networks and trends. Consumers tend to buy a new phone even if it is not entirely sustainable in terms of consumption<sup>5</sup>, but because 'being trendy' is being promoted more than being 'green conscious'.

At the same time, it is important to ensure that the consumer receives complete and truthful information about the product. The topic has become so influential in the business world that so-called greenwashing has become accepted. Greenwashing is a form of marketing in which slogans and methods of promotion with green methods are applied<sup>6</sup>, but in fact, it is just a delusion about the goals of the organisation presenting them in a favourable light. The growing demand for eco-products has become an incentive for ecological speculation by unscrupulous producers as well as marketing specialists. This includes the groundless use of 'eco' and 'bio' labels<sup>7</sup>. As a clear instance, a manufacturer positioning a coating from wood as environmentally friendly can be taken. The company deliberately or unknowingly hides the fact that the

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<sup>1</sup> Simpson, C. W. and Prusak, L. 1995. Troubles with information overload – Moving from quantity to quality in information provision. *International Journal of Information Management*, 15: 413-425.

<sup>2</sup> Waytz, A., 2017. The Illusion of Explanatory Depth. Available at: <https://www.edge.org/response-detail/27117>.

<sup>3</sup> Schneider, S. C. 1987. Information overload: Causes and consequences. *Human Systems Management*, 7: 143-153.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Education for environmental sustainability: policies and approaches in European Union Member States: final report, Tasiopoulou, E.(editor), 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/391>. [L.s.20.03.2022].

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Environment, Policies to encourage sustainable consumption: full report, Publications Office, 2012, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/6032>. [L.s.20.03.2022].

<sup>6</sup> Rienstra, D. "Is Corporate Social Responsibility the Greening of Industry, or its Green washing?" *Humanitarian Affairs Review*. Spring (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Barone, M. J., Miyazaki, A. D., Taylor, K. A. (2000). The influence of cause-related marketing on consumer choice: Does one good turn deserve another? *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28, 245–267.

wood for the production was obtained with violations of forest laws, and for treatment used impregnations and paints with non-ecological composition. Natural products do not equal ecological products. Greenwashing significantly hinders the development of ecological production and consumption.

As a result, not only the deceived buyer suffers. Environmentally responsible business is replaced by enterprises<sup>8</sup>, which continue to pollute the air and water and do not recycle production wastes. This may create the illusion of competition and, as a result, a chance of failure of truly 'green' firms.

Modern market realities are such that there is little transparency in terms of information from the manufacturer and the buyer. Here the phenomenon, which will be discussed further – the illusion of explanatory depth – comes into the play. Big players are moving more and more to the side of awareness, but what about small and medium-sized businesses? It is considered to be crucially important to develop local rules for small and medium-sized enterprises, because they own a huge share of the markets of European countries<sup>9</sup>, but the same rules do not work in a same way in different markets. Therefore, the adaptation of common goals to the realities of individual micro-markets (countries, regions, cities) is considered to be an important aspect.

Sustainability itself is a very important skill, a set of knowledge and information that is gaining momentum in European countries. In the programs of various universities for several years there are subjects aimed at this topic. For example, at the Warsaw School of Economics, at the Global Business, Finance and Governance programme, there is a course called Sustainable Development, which studies the goals of Sustainable Development, climate, and consumer awareness issues, both on the part of the buyer and the business. So naturally, the pursuit of sustainability has major implications and projects to implement for education, training, and skills. For example: creating a need to increase environmental awareness in curricula (both primary and secondary and higher educational institutions); a need for the development of environmentally friendly technologies, production processes, products, services and business models in all sectors of the economy; a change in the way traditional knowledge is performed (and taught) and new types of learning; a need for close interaction between education and training systems and their environment to create an ecosystem of skills and values in which skills development goes hand in hand with economic, technological and social changes<sup>10</sup>.

For the entrepreneur the primary motivator, in addition to the overall eco-objective, should be creating new business opportunities by controlling resources, more innovative methods, and ultimately a better reputation – generating profit, but with a social focus. After all, based on the popularization of the problem, consumers are willing to pay more for products that take care of the environment<sup>11</sup>. That is, ecology becomes a new competitive advantage. It changes purchasing habits and the demand for new products and services. Taking all the above-mentioned, authors decided to check the green awareness of the taken sample of the young audience from the perspective of the illusion of explanatory depth.

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<sup>8</sup> Alves, I. M. (2009). Green spin everywhere: How greenwashing reveals the limits of the CSR paradigm. *Journal of Global Change and Governance*, 2, 9–34.

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Roig-Ramos, Thomas Pellerin-Carlin, *Cities in Europe: what EU innovation can do for climate neutrality*, Jacques Delors, Institute, September 2019.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Education for environmental sustainability: policies and approaches in European Union Member States: final report, 2022*, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/391>. [L. s.20.03.2022].

<sup>11</sup> Aryal, K.P., Chaudhary, P., Pandit, S. Sharma, G. (2009). Consumers' willingness to pay for organic products: a case from Kathmandu Valley. *The Journal of Agriculture and Environment*.

### **1. The illusion of explanatory depth**

The illusion of explanatory depth is an assumption that one perfectly understands cause and effect relationships, while, in reality, it is far from the case. Rozenblit and Keil, both Yale psychologists, first studied and coined this term back in 2002 with the study ‘The misunderstood limits of folk science: an illusion of explanatory depth. According to them, the Illusion of Explanatory Depth is the incorrectly held belief that one understands the world on a deeper level than one does<sup>12</sup>.

If there is a question about how the toilet works, most people will immediately answer: ‘Yes, I do know how it works, it's just a toilet’. But if the question of how the toilet works becomes exposed to be reflected and thought over, most people are getting confused, because actually the intuitive understanding of the toilet is very superficial, unless the respondent is not a plumber or good at engineering. The illusion of explanatory depth is, in other words, when people inaccurately overestimate their knowledge in a certain thing. The previous example of toilets can be swapped and replaced with refrigerators, zippers, locks, mathematics, history, art, general knowledge assessment or... sustainable development, global concepts of ideas like the European Green Deal. Authors find the phenomenon a relevant prism for analysing the level of awareness and knowledge in the eco-topic. There is an enormous amount of information regarding the topic all over the Internet and other channels, but how much do we really know about it and, hence, understand the importance of the issue?

### **2. Methodology and research and description**

The purpose of authors’ research is to investigate hypothesis as follows: there is a correlation in the level of eco-awareness and the level of the illusion of explanatory depth of young generation (residents of Poland are taken as a research group). Another issue that this article questions is whether respondents are aware about the problems that the European Green Deal aims to solve and is their consumer behaviour influenced by it. An online questionnaire was chosen for collecting the information.

The survey includes the personal data of the respondents (including nationality, age, and direction of study). This is done to enable further research/ hypotheses based on the information received. All questions that followed focuses on people's eco-habits. The authors tried to make them explicable to get answers without cognitive biases. An important factor is whether the co-respondent belongs not only to an understanding, but also to concrete actions from it. Also, is there a factor and acceptance that eco-labels improve the situation of the ecosystem or in their understanding this is just a marketing move.

The age group of students aged from 17 to 25 is chosen. The aim of this idea is to avoid increased bias research by interviewing people belonging to the same age and social group. It is also accessible, since one of the authors is a lecturer, and another author is a student herself. The survey has an online form, so it was clearly distributed among the participants. Since the research does not require physical presence, authors managed to attract the attention of students from different universities, cities and even countries according to the study purpose’s request. Authors chose the group of respondents with the minimal culture, age, and mindset differences. Ethnic groups in the majority: Ukrainians, Belarussians, Poles and Russians. The areas of study are completely different, most of them partly related to the topic of the environment. Authors aim to check whether respondents not only have a certain level of awareness, but also complete concrete actions

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<sup>12</sup> Menshykova, A., 2021. *The Illusion of Explanatory Depth from the Perspective of Gender Socialization*. Warsaw: Lazarski University Press.

based on them when it comes to their purchasing and consuming behaviour. A practical significance of the research is that the data may be used for further research to test different hypotheses. The question sets are shown in the Attachment 1.

## **Conclusions**

During the research and the hypotheses presented by the authors regarding the awareness of the problems solved by Green Deal as an indicator of influence on consumer behaviour due to the presence of the illusion of explanatory depth. Based on the answers of the respondents, where 27.5% knew exactly what the European Green Deal was or 43.5% partially, there is a misconception in many areas. Correspondents 'having knowledge in the field' still ended up doubting their power to change and tended to think that their already existing habits were insignificant.

This leads to the conclusion that there is insufficient promotion of the problem to a wide audience in a simple manner of expression. It is also necessary to consider that there is a demand for ecological products. According to the survey, most respondents, in addition to the purchase of green products, have 'green' habits. It is possible to trace a tendency of striving to develop resource saving behaviour (water saving category, electricity saving – 75.4%), the respondents try to take less packages and use reusable bags instead of them (60.9%).

At the same time, the choice of products due to marketing conventions is reduced to incorrect support for the choice of fake eco-labels, as 56.5% of the respondents chose eco and bio marks on a level with the official eco-labels. All in all, it is clear that the dissemination of information is present, but the correctness of its recreation and verification of receiving resources is insufficient.

To summarize, The European Union has launched the European Green Deal, which plans to turn the economy, politics, and people's personal lives towards eco. This is a very large-scale and deep transition, which consists not only in economic and political issues, but also in the awareness of consumers, in changing the usual rules of the market, consumption and choice. By and large, this issue is interesting and important to study from the perspective of behavioural economics and marketing because it is crucial to popularize an awareness and understanding of sustainability are those variables whose task is to change the behaviour of both sides of the market, both consumers and producers, towards the eco paradigm.

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### Attachment 1.

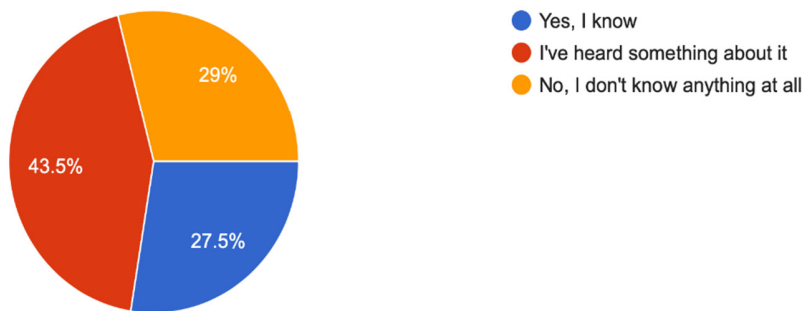
Used questionnaire:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/d/1aPLYr5R7sL57QJvCcmO1Rz\\_Piwu8D28v92YoVW2G6LE/printform](https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/d/1aPLYr5R7sL57QJvCcmO1Rz_Piwu8D28v92YoVW2G6LE/printform)

### Attachment 2. Diagrams

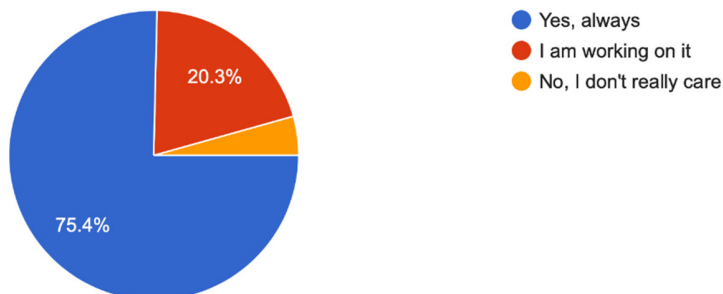
Do you know what is the European Green Deal?

69 responses



When you go out of the room, do you turn off the lights?

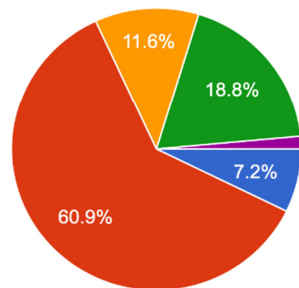
69 responses





When you go to the grocery, do you buy a plastic bag?

69 responses



- Yes, always
- I have my own reusable bag
- I am working on it
- When there is an option to choose at a grocery, I go for a paper bag
- I use Instacart and my groceries just come in the plastic bags. I then reuse those plastic bags for trash around the house.

How do you understand that the product is 'eco'? (you can choose multiple options here)

69 responses

